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I BELIEVE IN GOD

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I Believe in God
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I Believe in God

A. Maude Royden

HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS
NEW YORK AND LONDON

DEDICATED TO
MY CONGREGATION
AT THE
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C — C

PREFACE

SINCE I am neither a scientist nor a theologian, I suppose that Messrs Benn asked me to write this book because I am one of many thousands who, without the opportunity or the capacity to become expert, must nevertheless live and seek to find some meaning in life. There are advantages in being an expert: there are some advantages in not being an expert. I will diffidently assume that at least these are mine.

Certainly my book will not please the orthodox. I wish it might please the scientist, but I fear it will not either. Yet I think it worth writing, for I fancy there are millions of people like me. They deeply respect and value the work of the experts, but agree with neither scientist nor theologian altogether, unless the scientist is something else besides being a scientist; such as Arthur Thomson or Oliver Lodge.

I am glad, too, to make as clear as I can what my own position is and what I am driving at. In ecclesiastical matters I am "a soul naturally Anglican."

Too Anglican to care for the rigid logical completeness of either High or Low Church extremes, or for the intellectualism of the Broad Church. I want something of all of them, and am convinced that the Church of England is the place where I ought to be able to have them and can have them all. Again, I believe that in this I am one of a great host.

It will be seen at once that I have no claim to scholarship. I should, however, explain that I have avoided some of the circumlocutions of the scholar, not in ignorance, but because they seem to me, for

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ordinary people like myself, superfluous. If I speak of " St John " instead of " the Author of the Fourth Gospel " it is not because I have any theory about that authorship, but merely because the Fourth Gospel is as well known to most of us by that name as the First by the name of St Matthew. We do not know the author of either, but it is tiresome, except for questions of exegesis, to be saddled with such phrases as " the Author of the First Gospel "—" the Author of the Fourth Gospel "—and the like, when so simple a phrase as " St Matthew," " St John," is in common use.

In matters that are even more vital than ecclesiastical order or scholarship—in religious matters—as my title says, " I Believe in God." From this belief flows my belief in a purpose in life and a universal order or law. I see this law as love, and the purpose of life is to understand and co-operate with it. To be a fellow-worker with God is a destiny so august as to seem to many impossible. " What is man that thou art mindful of him? Or the son of man that thou so regardest him? " It would seem arrogant to me also if Christ, in whom I see the Word of God to man, had not called us to it. It is now no longer arrogant to attempt it; it rather becomes insolent to refuse it. " Thou hast made him a little lower than God, to crown him with glory and worship."

A. MAUDE ROYDEN.

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Chapter I.

God in the Universe

"I had sooner believe all the fables of the Talmud and the Alkoran than that this universal frame of things is without a Mind." Science has greatly advanced since Bacon wrote that, but though it has defined its own scope a little more clearly and does not profess (whatever its less-informed defenders claim for it) to be concerned with the beginnings or endings of things, nor with the question of the existence or non-existence of God, has it shown us anything that can make us unsay what Bacon said?

It has done the exact opposite. It has shown us an order in the universe which is far more sublime, more harmonious, than even the genius of Bacon then perceived or could perceive. The astronomer at one end, the physicist and the chemist at the other, have revealed this order prevailing in the infinitely great and the infinitesimally small. To me, at least, they have made it impossible to believe that this universal frame of things can be without a Mind.

The stars move in their courses and the comets—once called eccentric—in theirs, in an order which covers the almost infinite in space and time. The electrons of the atom in theirs—and it is the same order. Has any human mind ever learned this without admiration and awe?

The universe in its unimaginable variety and beauty is built up out of atoms, ninety-two in number. These atoms resemble each other and differ only arithmetically. One has one proton and one electron; another one proton and two electrons; another one proton and three electrons. Can any one learn of this simple arithmetical basis for all the wonder and diversity of the universe without echoing Sir William Bragg's words—"It is wonderful: the mind can never cease to wonder at it"?

Our wonder is an intelligent wonder. It is not a wonder at the astonishing vagaries of chance, but a wonder full of admiration for the astonishing significance and beauty of universal order. I submit that for most of us it is simply impossible to conceive such order without also supposing a mind behind it. I must not say that for all of us it is impossible. A distinguished writer[1] not long ago declared that the universe was "obviously meaningless to us," and maintained this view seriously in the face of criticism and attack. One must admit, therefore, that it is possible to some highly intelligent people to see order and beauty without seeing meaning. It is not possible to me. If I see a picture like, for example, "The Last Supper," of Leonardo da Vinci, I cannot help believing that it is the product of a mind. If I read a play like Shakespeare's "Hamlet" it makes the same impression on me. I know not much about Leonardo and almost nothing about Shakespeare. I see also that the picture is defaced and faded—the play in parts incomprehensible. I, for that reason, cannot believe that the picture happened by chance, or that a number of children threw a box of paints

[1] Mr Leonard Woolf, in the *Nation*, 12th June 1926.

at the wall and the resultant splashes formed what I now take for a picture. I cannot believe that a number of compositors flung type into the air and as it fell it happened to arrange itself into the lines that we call the play of "Hamlet." I believe that both play and picture were created by a mind. It is true that I cannot prove it, but I believe it.

I cannot prove that the stones at Stonehenge or of the Pyramids or the Coliseum were placed as they are in obedience to a design which existed in some one's mind, for I know nothing about their architects and builders, and less about the religion of the people who created Stonehenge. But if I declare that there must have been some design in the arrangement, and that a design implies a mind designing, I say a thing which the enormous mass of my fellow-humans will agree with. Nor is this true only of the uneducated mass. The scientist also believes it. He affirms that there are ninety-two different kinds of atoms, though he has not yet discovered these ninety-two. In that arithmetical progression two numbers are still missing.[1] The search for the missing elements continues. Why? On what grounds does the scientist suppose that they exist? He reasons that if there is one atom containing one electron and one proton, another with two electrons and one proton, another with three, and so on, up to ninety-two electrons and one proton, there must be ninety-two atoms. Again why? If the universe is without meaning and without mind, why should there not be gaps in this apparently orderly sequence? The order must be only apparent and the gaps quite "natural"! But no one can really believe this. If

[1] Numbers eighty-five and eighty-seven.

the sequence is complete, say, up to eighty-four, and then again begins at eighty-six and continues, it is quite impossible to believe that eighty-five does not exist. It would be too irrational! But who told us that the universe was rational? There are people who perceive in it no significance at all. To them the universe is "meaningless." Who is to convince them that they are wrong? Who can prove that they are wrong? No one. But the scientist goes on looking for these missing atoms and believes that they must be there, because it would be irrational for them to be absent.

So, as I look at the universe through the telescope of the astronomer or seek to measure it with the X-ray apparatus of the physicist, and find order everywhere, I believe and I must believe in Mind. The blots and scratches on the picture of the Last Supper—the corrupt and now probably for ever meaningless passages in Hamlet—trouble me: so do the cruelties and uglinesses of life in this majestic universe. Neither the one nor the other can even begin to convince me that there was no mind behind the picture—that there is no Mind behind the universe.

This Mind I call God. What do you call it? The First Cause? The Source of Being? The First Principle? Why use such long words? They all mean the same thing, and I mean that same thing when I say "I believe in God." It is true that there are things in the universe more mysterious to the understanding than the corrupt passages in Shakespeare's plays. There are depths in the character of Hamlet himself—difficulties that critics and interpreters will discuss and disagree about till the end.

Is that wonderful? Has one of them the mind of Shakespeare? Can the pigmy measure the giant or the critical wholly grasp the creative mind?

There are unfathomable mysteries in the universe —unfathomable to our minds at least. What we do understand is already magnificent, in view of our pitiful little apparatus. "We are equipped only with our senses and, with these, our reason," says Sir Oliver Lodge, "and even this little apparatus was not evolved for the purpose of discovering abstract truth, but only to get us food and to win us safety from our enemies. Yet, thus equipped, we set out to plumb the inexhaustible mystery of the universe!" It is magnificent: it makes one proud to be a man. Let us be proud for we have a right to be: but let us also be modest. We cannot understand or explain all for we have not the means. What we do understand is so beautiful, so lawful, so significant, that we cannot refrain from the belief that behind all this there surely is a God.

Chapter II.

The Relation of God to the Universe

If there is a God in the universe or behind the universe, what is his relation to it? We are told in the first chapter of the Book of Genesis that "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." This word "created" troubles the modern man. He ponders it and reflects that science says nothing about the world being created or made, whether in six days or six million or six billion years. It says indeed nothing about such making, but takes the universe as it is and describes it, to our unspeakable admiration. What does the word "created" mean? In what sense shall we say that God is the "Creator" of the universe?

We live in time and space, and all our efforts do not help us to think in other words or terms than those of time and space. Our minds are not able for the task. We dimly perceive that these are very limited ideas and grope after something else and better. Still we cannot do it. The work of Einstein is helping us to "see round the corner" and to use formulæ expressive of something which our intelligence cannot grasp. Presumably some day we really shall see round the corner. Our very language to-day proves that we cannot do it now. If I try to think of infinity—eternity—my words as well as my thoughts are words and thoughts not of eternity

and infinity at all, but of time and space. If any one tries he will find himself in the same difficulty. Our words can only *begin* to express what we mean by being simply negative. Infinite—what is that but just "not finite"? It does not really get us any further, although it makes us realise that there is a "further" to get to, if only we had other than human minds to think with.

So we seek some other word or phrase or circumlocution for "creation." "Creation" is suspect. It is even supposed by many people to imply a certain definite theory: perhaps to bind one to the belief that the first chapter of Genesis is an historical or scientific record of an event which took place about six thousand years ago. What word, however, *can* we use to describe what we do not understand and cannot imagine? If I believe, as I do, that there is a meaning and a purpose behind the universe, and call this meaning "God," I must have a word which describes what God is in the universe, and since, in any case, what I am trying to describe is something greater than I can understand, I shall not find the word I want. Let us be bold. Creation is as good a word as any we are likely to invent now. God is "the Source of all Being." In the beginning (or "in principle") God created the heaven and the earth.

Is he then responsible for all things created, both good and evil? This seems logically necessary to believe, if he is the Source of all Being. Nor do I think that any theory or any theologian, Christian or Hindu, quite meets the intellectual difficulty of the question. No one can refrain from putting it. It puts itself. It puts itself with agonising and tragic

persistence. The man who leaves it unanswered leaves himself in a state of mental and spiritual dissatisfaction. How did evil come into the world? What is its source? its meaning? Evil—interpreted as suffering or as sin—disturbs the least thoughtful sometimes, and is a source of tragic difficulty to those who think most deeply. The world is full of harmony and beauty: true. Too full it is for me to deny the purpose and significance behind it. The law and the beauty are overwhelmingly present and convincingly significant. Yet there is also horror, brutality, and pain. I cannot explain them and I believe that no one ever has.

Two explanations are offered, and all others are variants of these. One is that there are two powers in the universe, one good, one evil: perpetual war is waged between them: the world as we see it is the result.

This is an explanation; but one impossible for most of us moderns to accept. All our thought and all our knowledge tends to convince us of the unity of things. We really do, we believe, live in and form part of a "universe"—not a chaos. To imagine this universe a mere battle-field for two opposing forces, equal or nearly equal in strength, is for us an impossibility. Behind the struggle and the incompleteness, behind the insoluble problem of evil, there must be Unity.

The second answer denies the problem of evil altogether. Evil, it tells us, does not in fact exist. All is God and all is therefore good. The idea that there is evil is a delusion, existing only in our mistaken thoughts.

This may well be true: but how does it help us?

In some sense many of us—I for one—feel convinced that evil *is* a delusion—a madness, not a reality. The thought, however, is terrible to me. What is more terrible than to live in a lie? If evil exists only in my thought, it exists where it is most real to me! I desire the truth, and am expected to be consoled with the assurance that the only evil in the universe is in my own mind! Who would not prefer almost any disease to a disease of the mind? Who would not welcome physical pain, if it were the alternative to madness? Moreover, though I think indeed that the evil of the universe is a kind of madness, I cannot find in that an answer to my insistent question—How did this madness come about? How is it that we are all mad? How shall we regain the sanity of truth?

And to this question I must again say that, having considered the two answers offered me, I feel no final satisfaction in either. I have no final answer in them, though sincere attempts to state one have helped me to see a little further. I believe with the Christian Scientist that evil is not real in the sense that good is. It is not positive; it is not lasting. Only good lasts. Even in our humble human experience we find that this is true. Good work lasts; good building endures. Even good clothes last longer than bad ones. One says of good work: "They seem to have been working for eternity."

Evil is negative; good positive. Evil, like darkness, is the absence of light: we cannot say that light is the absence of darkness. Cold is the absence of heat, death is the absence of life, evil the absence of good—the shutting out of God. The most terrible *appearance* of reality and positiveness must not blind

us to the truth of this. People ask me whether I can possibly believe that such a horror (for example) as the Great War was a merely negative "shutting out of God." Certainly I think it is, although it appears positive enough, God knows. I am reminded of an experiment described to us by the French naturalist Fabre, who, for the enlightenment of two little scholars, put a bird under a bell-glass from which the oxygen had been exhausted. The little creature, of course, panted, struggled, gasped, fell into a kind of convulsion, and in a few seconds was dead. The boys asked what was in the glass and were told "nitrogen only." "What a terrible poison this nitrogen must be!" they exclaimed. "Not at all," said Fabre, "nitrogen is in the air that we are breathing all the time and it does us no harm. It is not the presence of the nitrogen—it is the absence of the oxygen that has thrown this little bird into convulsions, and eventually has killed him."

Is this not a picture of the world in the convulsions of war? It is not the presence of any positive evil—it is the absence of the positive good of love—of God—that convulses us with agony and destroys us. It looks positive enough; it is, in fact, mere negation.

In God we live and move and have our being. Where he is shut out, there is death, disease, pain, and sin. This *is* "sin"—to shut out God.

Of course one is here involved once more in the old difficulty of language. How can we "shut out" God, if he is universal and omnipresent? I do not know, and I realise that, if we could indeed shut him out, we should cease to exist. But I know, too, that we do *in some sense* shut him out, whenever we are

cruel or frightened or evil, and I must use the only words there are, however clumsy. Evil, then, is the *absence* of God and in no sense "created" by him. There is no such thing as darkness, though many of us are in the dark.

There is, however, a third answer to our problem, which does, I understand, meet the difficulty for some. It is the answer of free will. God has given us some power of choice—some moral freedom—and to many, I realise, this is enough to explain all. "If we are free," they say, "we must be free to choose wrong. We did choose wrong. This is how evil has come into the world." That is logical, so far as it goes; but though one must have the *chance* of choosing wrong in order to have any moral being at all, one does not have the *obligation* to choose wrong. Logically—if morality implies freedom—God can choose wrong; but morally can he? And if a perfect God is morally incapable of a wrong choice, how could the perfect creatures of a perfect God be capable of choosing wrong? I believe we did and do, but I cannot find any answer to the question—How did we come to do so?

Jesus Christ gives me no logical answer here. All other great religious teachers try to, but not he. The writer of the Book of Genesis does, but not the Christ of the Gospels. St Paul does, but not Jesus. Why not? Should we not with justice have expected a revelation on this tragically important question from one who claims to be the Light of the World? I did expect it, and I searched the Gospels for a solution. It is there; but not in the form that I expected.

The first impression created on the mind of a

reader of the Gospels is probably that Jesus accepted the first of the two solutions offered to humanity in the past—the solution of the two gods, good and evil, "God" and "the devil," who divide the universe between them. He even uses the language of this belief: "I beheld Satan as lightning falling from heaven." Do these words not imply a dual deity?

Yes—literally they do. I cannot, however, afford to take literally one whose greatest interpreter warned us that literalism kills.[1] I am no more inclined to believe that Christ believed in the devil because he spoke of the devil than I believe that the reader of this book believes the sun sets because he speaks of a sunset. We shall probably always speak of the sun "setting" and "rising," "coming out" or "going in," "passing behind a cloud" or "shining out again," and shall not mean that any of these things literally happen. So a profane man—not I, of course—will say "what the devil do you mean?" without believing in the devil he invokes. So a great—even the greatest—Teacher will, because he is a poet too, use the vivid language of poem and picture, and only the incredibly dull of heart will misunderstand him.

I find no dual control of the universe in the teaching of Christ. He spoke of the devil as I speak of a shadow. Is there such a thing as a shadow? Or does my use of the word imply my belief in its separate, real, and independent existence? No. I know very well that shadows are only the intercepting of the light; yet I speak of "casting" a shadow—I say my shadow "falls" or "lengthens" or "shortens."

[1] St Paul, 2 Cor. iii. 6.

So I say : it is only a saying. In fact, I know very well that shadows have no real existence, being only a cutting off of the light.

A man who lived in darkness would not know of the existence of shadows. A man who lived in the half-light of a misty and temperate climate like ours would know but not notice them much. One who lived in the brilliant sunshine of the South would think of a shadow as a sharp-edged, black, almost a visible thing. May we not interpret our Lord's language so ? To us indeed the shutting out of the light of the Divine seems hardly a noticeable thing : we live in the half-lights all the time ; but to Christ what a horror—how black, how sharp, how vivid—is the impression created by evil ! To him the shutting out of God was the last and unimaginable horror. It was natural to him to speak of it as a definite, even a personified thought. We must not attempt to convert such pictorial language as he uses into a logical syllogism.

I believe that Christ did not even attempt to explain the problem of evil to us because we have not the capacity to understand. No one tries to explain a problem in geometry to a child who cannot yet count beyond his fingers and toes. This is not contempt. It does not rule out the belief that the child will some day be able to count more than ten, or the possibility that he may in time surpass all other geometricians. Now, however, he does not understand, and has not the capacity to understand, and the teacher does not attempt to give him an explanation wholly beyond his intellectual reach.

For this reason (I believe) Christ did not try to solve for us the problem of the origin of evil. But

we desire a solution. We *need* a solution. Did he leave us without hope of one? Certainly not. He gave us the only sure hope of one that exists, and with that a motive for continual effort after greater understanding.

We cannot understand because we are still partly evil. We are involved in evil and so we cannot see it. The man who is inside a building cannot really describe its size and shape, because he is inside. An architect or builder might make some interesting guesses. Even a layman would know a little from the existence and the placing of the windows. But he would know so little—till he got out. So we, still enmeshed in evil, are not able to understand or to see it clearly. One who did understand and tried to make us understand would be like a sane person explaining insanity to a madman. We are all a little mad because all a little evil, and Christ knew that and gave us our only solution—our only remedy. "Be not overcome with evil but overcome evil with good," said St Paul, and summed up his Master's teaching on the problem of evil. The only way to understand madness is to become sane: the only way to see a building is to get outside it.

The answer of Christ satisfies me as no other does. I see its reasonableness. I see that it recognises all the facts and does not find a simple solution to a terribly complex difficulty by the attractive process of ignoring the most difficult factors in it. I find in it the hope of an ultimate solution, for, while it says "You cannot understand yet," it implies that I shall understand some day, and it shows me how to begin my own education. "Be not overcome with evil": do not abandon the problem: do not rest till it is

solved and you are satisfied. But " overcome evil with good " : in desiring truth at any cost, in seeking it always, in loving goodness and practising it, you will gradually escape from evil and will see it clearly at last, because you are outside and above it.

It is true that this position is, as I suggested at the beginning, one of mental and spiritual dissatisfaction. That is one of the things that the seeker after truth must recognise and endure. If I am right, we *cannot* be satisfied yet. The fact that we are still partly evil makes it impossible for us to reach the satisfaction of a complete solution. Since this is so, it is better to face it than to evade the pain of accepting a solution which succeeds in being logical by ignoring half the facts.

This is why I cannot accept either of the two solutions generally offered. The whole trend of modern scientific thought makes it impossible for me to believe in a God divided against himself. A superficial view of the universe may present to us such an idea of God—or gods. But the deeper our knowledge the more superficial such an explanation appears. There is unity in Nature : I cannot believe in a discordant God behind it.

The assurance that there is no evil at all except in my misguided mind brings me some sense of intellectual satisfaction. It is surely further on than the naïve dualism of the older method of thought. But again I feel that the facts are being ignored. The importance of mind—the power and reality of thought—are emphasised to us more and more by every advance of science and philosophy. How then can I be satisfied with the assurance that it is " only in my mind " that evil exists ?

No : I cannot understand yet. Loyalty to truth compels the admission that I do not here know what to believe. My position is that of a man who admits that darkness has no positive existence—yet must confess that he is in the dark ; that cold is merely the absence of heat—yet that he is cold.

It is illogical. A completely logical solution would be worse because it would of necessity be false. We do not know all the facts, and until we do, the more complete our solution the more certainly it is unsound.

Chapter III.

Personality in God

The universe is itself sufficient to convince me that there is a God: but what sort of a God? Can we know anything more about him than that he (or it) exists? I know, at least, that if he is the Source of Being he must be the source of my being, and that all that I have or am of real must be derived from him.

The most real *me* is my personality: therefore personality exists in God. The only objection to this blunt statement lies in the fact that the word "personality" suggests to us human personality with all its limitations and its caprice. The result of our worship of a personal God has been a suffocatingly narrow religion, with a deity who resembled some human personality that we could readily imagine to ourselves—a large policeman or overwhelming clergyman. These mistaken ideas no longer hold us; we revolt from them. I personally find in the doctrine of the Trinity their corrective without losing the idea of personality in God.

The number three stands for infinity. Savages know "one," and more than "one" is "two." More than two is a great many—more than he can count—an infinite number. He develops by degrees a higher capacity for counting, but still the number three stands for infinity and remains for the human

race a mystical number. The doctrine of the Trinity appears in many systems of religious thought, and is not, as most people know, at all peculiar to Christian theology. Beauty, Truth, and Goodness (or Love) are a Trinity: God transcendent, immanent, incarnate, is another. Three *is* a mystical number, and the attempt to combine the infinite of God with his personality is surely as nearly successful when we say that he is "Three Persons in one God" (quite different from saying that he is "a Person") as human language can hope to get. Unity in diversity —personality in infinity—it is the language and the thought of poetry, and poetry is deeper and truer than logic. Logic can state what we can comprehend, but poetry alone what we can only apprehend.

Since I believe that there is personality in God (or how could he have created it?) I see that it is under this aspect that I must seek communion with him. I think of God in the highest terms possible to me, but I cannot think of him in terms that are *not* possible to me! I must think of God as personal or I cannot think of him at all.

There are teachers who urge us to deny to our thought of God any human attribute or quality. But since we are ourselves human, how are we to think in other than human terms? Clearly we cannot, and the attempt to do so leaves us with a purely negative God. We may say of him that he is (to choose words almost at random from our hymns and creeds) immortal, invisible, inaccessible, "unresting, unhasting, nor wanting nor wasting," incomprehensible, uncreate: but this is only to say that he is *not* any of the things that we refer to—finite, visible, accessible, mortal, and so forth. We

are right to remember God in these terms for, unless we do so, we shall once more fall into the error of thinking of him as human. We do well to remind ourselves continually that he is beyond our human thought and never to be comprehended by our human minds. We want to get away from the suffocating narrowness and individualism of some of our popular theology. But it is a mere irrational swing of the pendulum that makes us bamboozle ourselves into thinking that we really *think* " infinity " and " eternity " when we use these high words. Their whole point for us, in this connection, is that, being negative, they keep us in mind of our human limitations. Every one who tries to express what we mean by them, to argue about the conditions they imply, or to draw conclusions from them, finds at once that he is talking of incomprehensibles. We say desperately " language is such a clumsy thing," and so it is ; but it is clumsy because our thoughts are clumsy, and only misrepresents them a little.

To refuse to think of God in terms which we can understand is to refuse to think of him at all. It is in fact atheism ; for a God of whom we cannot think at all is no-God to us. If more people do not realise this, it is because they do not realise how much of the personal is mixed with their most earnest striving after the thought of the Impersonal.

I believe that there is personality in God. If there is not, then either he does not exist or he does not exist for me. To think of him as personal is anthropomorphism and we had better make up our minds to it. I know that " crude anthropomorphism " is responsible for horrible mistakes, but I am sure also that to try to escape from anthropomorphism (with-

out the crude) is futile. We think with human minds our human thoughts in human words, and it is impossible for us to do otherwise. We see with human eyes, and the scientist warns us that there are rays beyond our seeing and fineness of structure beyond the structure of light; but he does not abuse us as anthropomorphists because we go on looking at so much as we can see with such eyes as we have, as some high-browed theologians do. He seeks to "enable" with a greater light the knowledge of our purblind sight, and to eke out sight with reason. So should we do who seek God. But it is still with human eyes that we must see and with human minds that we must reason, if we reason and see at all.

"If a triangle had a god," said Herbert Spencer, "he would think that god was essentially triangular." Of course he would; and he would be right at least in thinking that triangularity could not be unless it were in God! He would only be wrong if he supposed that triangularity on a vast scale was the whole of God. So we, like the triangle, must think of God in our own way, and even in our own image. We are right so long as we realise that our idea of him is inadequate; we are only wrong when we dream that it is complete.

Browning, who was fond of music, thought of the Divine that "others may reason and welcome: 'tis we musicians know."[1] I read a little while ago an interesting and valuable pamphlet showing that only mathematicians can really enter into the mind of God who is himself first of all a mathematician.[2]

[1] "Abt Vogler."

[2] "Mathematics and Eternity." By Hilda Hudson, Student Christian Movement.

"God on his throne is oldest of poets," sings a poet.[1]

So he is. So must we think of him — mathematician, poet, musician. Let us admit the necessity of our human thought and escape its ill-effects by remembering with a depth of humility its utter insufficiency. So long as we do so, our thoughts though so human, so anthropomorphical, are not false. They are valid—as far as they go. Only we must admit that they do not go far.

The only alternative to this anthropomorphism is nescience. It is to deny, not only that we know anything, but that we *can* know anything. The moment we refuse to think of God with human thought because our human thoughts are not good enough, we must cease to think of him at all.

It is true, moreover, that there is some property in us which is spiritual and transcends the intellect. With this we "see God." Greater than the magician is the poet, and it is in insight—in spirit—that he is greater. There is no conflict here: the insight of Shakespeare does not conflict with his reason but transcends it. It is the same quality in him which makes the difference between the genius of a Newton or a Darwin and the ability of the laborious collector of facts. One *sees* more than the other, in the same facts.

We all see something of the universe in which we live, beyond the facts that present themselves to the intelligence. Most of us, I believe, see meaning and purpose in it, and realise that we see only a very little of that meaning. This faculty of insight, however, is our safeguard against "crude" anthro-

[1] William Watson.

pomorphism. When it awakes in us, we fall down and worship. We do not comprehend (grasp) but for a moment we apprehend (touch) the infinite transcendent Deity whose creatures we are and whose nature we share in some degree, however small. We rise above our own limitations for an instant and see God in his eternal aspect. Perhaps the great saints and prophets can even keep that vision not for a moment but for hours. Yet they come back and cannot tell the world.

Chapter IV.

The Meaning of Beauty

The insight into things which exalts the spirit to worship is the faculty of seeing beauty. There is beauty in sheer order, and that is why the physicist and the chemist are often poets unaware. The harmony of things is music and their universal order beauty. It is astonishing to reflect that the mere existence of such order or law seemed to men at one time to destroy the poetry of Nature. Huxley says scornfully :—

"When astronomy was young the morning stars shouted together for joy, and the planets were guided in their courses by celestial hands. Now the harmony of the stars has resolved itself into gravitation, according to the inverse square of distances, and the orbits of the planets are deducible from the laws of the forces which allow a schoolboy's stone to break a window . . . and we know that every flash that shimmers about the horizon on a summer's evening is determined by ascertainable conditions, and that its direction and brightness might, if our knowledge of these were great enough, have been calculated." [1]

It is strange to me, as to most moderns, that such majestic order should seem unbeautiful. To us the order revealed by the Newtonian astronomy is like music, and the knowledge that the stars move in their appointed courses in obedience to universal law is to us the music of the spheres.

[1] Huxley. "Lay Sermons : On the Origin of Species."

"There's not a single star which thou behold'st
But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young-ey'd cherubins.
Such harmony is in immortal souls,
But while this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close it in we cannot hear it."

Some faculty within us which I shall call "the Spirit," penetrates at times this muddy vesture of decay, and we do hear it.

We know now that order and beauty are universal. Not astronomy only but physics—not the great in Nature only but the minutely small—reveal to us this amazing fact. "There are curiously few general affirmations that we can make about Nature; one is that Nature is in great part intelligible or rationalisable, and another is that Nature is in greater part beautiful. . . . If the popular impression be that beauty is the exception, the scientific impression is that beauty is the rule. For a long time, perhaps till the middle of the nineteenth century, beauty was very generally spoken of as a quality of exotic—the orchid and the bird of paradise—now we feel it most at our door. St Peter's lesson has been learned, for we find nought common on the earth. As one of the poets says, beauty crowds us all our life."[1] We could not know how true this was till science told us of it. Its students have dredged from the bottom of the sea slime which, microscopically examined, is found to contain myriads of living organisms. They come not only from where no human eye can see them, but from where there is neither sight nor light. In the depths of the sea no ray of light can penetrate,

[1] "The System of Animate Nature," vol. i., chap. viii. J. Arthur Thomson.

no living creature has developed any organ of vision. Yet these living creatures are in structure as beautiful as the rose-window of a Gothic cathedral. All the genius of the artist and the craftsmen of the best ages of our building could not outdo them in beauty. Why is that?

It may be argued that there is nothing in the universe that is not beautiful, except where man has touched it. The prize-pig, exploited rather than evolved by man for his own purposes, is not beautiful; but the wild boar is, if we see him in his native surroundings, and admit the savage and the harsh into our conception of beauty. Even ugliness of a certain kind may, paradoxically, be a part of beauty, as discords are a part of music. The gargoyles of a Gothic cathedral are part of the artist's scheme of things as the tortoise and the toad of God's.

Biological necessity cannot account for all this beauty. It has been an overworked theory from the beginning, and it breaks down altogether as an explanation of beauty that is unseen; of the beauty of the microscopic organisms of the lightless, sightless sea; of the needless superfluous beauty of the sea itself, or the rainbow, the sky, and the stars.

What is the explanation of it? There is only one explanation—it is that God is Love.

What a leap! It makes one gasp. Yet does any one offer me another explanation? Has any one ever seen beauty created and not by a lover?

Ruskin[1] tells us of his perplexity at the extreme and vulgar ugliness of the huge statues on the façade of St Peter's in Rome. It often caused him to marvel.

[1] Ruskin constantly dwells on this connection between beauty and love, but especially in "The Seven Lamps of Architecture."

One day, however, he climbed up the roof and so saw the creatures from the back, and behold they had no back! Their maker had cared for them so little that he would not carve an inch where the carving did not show. The fronts of the statues were his sole preoccupation. These fronts, indeed, he did carve to the best of his ability, to adorn the enormously conspicuous place they were to occupy, high on the front of the greatest church in Christendom. He might have saved his labour. He could not make the fronts of the statues beautiful because he did not really care about them; he only cared to make an effect, and the effect he made was hideous.

There are other churches where the carving is as careful and as true in parts that no one sees as on the great façades. If you have the luck to go into such a church when there is scaffolding up for some reason of cleaning or repair, and you climb up the scaffolding, you will find beauty in hidden unexpected places—carving carefully finished to the very end—exquisite little grotesques hidden quite out of sight.

I have been told that in the great period of watchmaking it is quite usual to find that the craftsman has chased the works of the watch with delicate and beautiful designs. No one sees these works except the repairer if the watch goes wrong. The craftsman made that beauty in them because he loved beauty and loved his work. If I were to be shown such a watch I, totally ignorant as I am, would have no knowledge of the man who made it; I should not know to what country he belonged nor in what century he was born. I should not know his name or his origin or how he looked. I should know only

one single thing about him, but that thing I should know with absolute certainty : I should know that he loved his work.

Women make beautiful little garments for their children. They put into them, often, much fine stitchery, and give their time and toil and perhaps even sacrifice their eyesight to the fineness and beauty of the work. To what end ? Does the child know how beautiful it is, or care ? So long as its clothes are soft and warm enough, it needs and it cares for nothing more. She, however, cannot be content with this. She will not let the little frocks be "machine-made"; she will lavish her labour upon them. She does it because she loves the child.

I look at the universe with my naked sight, through the telescope, or through the microscope. Everywhere I see beauty. "This is as true of the microscopic cells of Foraminifera and Radiolarians—which are joys for ever—as of the lines of the crane and of the cedar of Lebanon. It is as true of the carefully-hidden down-feathers of the eagle as of the tail of the peacock. It is as true of the internal architecture of a sea-urchin's spine as of the external moulding of a tiger. It is as true of the minute chiselling of many a moth's egg-shell as of the sweeping lines of an Iguanodon."[1] I no longer ask myself with the exquisitely naïve egotism of another age why—

> "Full many a flower is born to blush unseen
> And waste its sweetness on the desert air"—

but I do ask myself why all things are so beautiful. And I know, if my human experience and human

[1] "The System of Animate Nature." vol. i., chap. viii. J. Arthur Thomson.

reasoning have any validity and worth at all, that it is because they were made by a lover.

The ugliness of our modern civilisations, and the industrial system which has so largely atrophied our power of creation and our sense of beauty, perhaps makes this argument less moving than it should be. Yet, even so, most of us, thank God, sometimes make something. Nothing that we make can be beautiful unless we love it. In a deeper sense indeed we cannot *make* anything at all unless we love it. There is a wonderful unity of idea running through the Bible which we realise when we say that "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth," and again in the Book of Wisdom, "Never wouldst thou have created anything if thou hadst hated it," and again, "God is Love." This, a more creative age would surely have known without further revelation than the revelation of the beauty of the world. Even to us it must be obvious that beauty, at least, was never made except by love. This we know, and the knowledge cannot be taken from us by any perplexity or doubt. The craftsman covering the works of his watch with beautiful designs, through the darkness of our perplexity and doubt stretches out his hand and touches the hand of God.

Christ told us to consider the lilies of the field. Why? Because when we see their beauty we see the handiwork of God. In a sense indeed we see God himself, who, like a lover, cares to make the grass of the field lovely, though "it is to-day, and to-morrow is cast into the oven." It was perhaps by a divine instinct that the older writer of the Book of Genesis found in the rainbow the assurance of the trustworthiness of God. The rainbow has no biological

value for its beauty! It is gorgeously, uselessly, superfluously lovely. "And God said, this is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations. I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth."

Beauty is the token of the covenant of God. It is our proof that God is Love. This is why beauty brings to us such a sense of peace and fulfilment. The atheist and the agnostic can sit down with the Christian before great beauty, whether natural or of art, and find that this beauty brings peace to his soul. They will not say with him that it is because beauty is the expression of love, nor will they admit that no one and nothing but love could have created it. Yet it speaks to them with the direct voice of God, and, because it speaks to them of love, they, even though they do not understand the language, are calmed, inspired, restored by it. It is curious and touching to reflect how often the lover of beauty, even though he calls himself a Christian, will instinctively flee from the ugly, cheap, and shoddy building which Christians have too often called "the House of God," and declare that he can worship better "under the blue dome of heaven." Certainly he often can, for where beauty is there is the presence and the voice of God. He also may not argue about it, but he also knows that beauty is love.

Even the fact that, when we are too unhappy, beauty becomes a mockery to us, only confirms what I say. It is because we recognise that beauty means love that beauty rests and restores us. If, maddened by pain, we can no longer believe in

love, beauty itself becomes a horror. It is *only* dear—only restorative—when it means love. It is still beautiful when we are most unhappy, but, if we have got so deep and suffered so much that we cannot believe in love, we turn from beauty finding it a mockery. It seems to make our suffering all the worse that it should be mocked by the beauty of Nature. Is this not another way of repeating that it is the love behind the beauty that makes beauty an inspiration to us?

The universality of beauty is here my guide. I do not deny that there are blots upon it. Physiologists and anatomists have revealed to me surpassing beauty in the bodies of men and women. How wonderful they are! One has only to look at a man's hand and see in it the wonderful adaptation to his need—an adaptation which makes it almost possible for us to say that he has literally climbed his way up the tree of evolution with that wonderful hand of his. All the gold in America, all the genius of science and of craftsmanship, cannot give to him who has lost a hand a hand that will be a hundredth-part as beautiful, as serviceable as his own. If sometimes we see the human hand twisted with rheumatism, the body bowed and crippled with pain, we must not turn away our eyes or refuse to see what looks like a contradiction in our theology. There are after all some ugly things in Nature itself, even where man has not touched it. Professor Arthur Thomson himself points out the ugliness of some forms of parasitic life, as well as of the exploited domestic animal. Will this make me unsay what I have said?

Let me go back to my Leonardo picture. Those who have seen it will remember how marred it is—

how faded, how scratched, how defaced. They will also remember, especially if they are artists themselves, the extraordinary beauty of line, mass, and colour. They will recognise in it one of the great pictures of the world, and if they are artists themselves, I suppose they will see a hundred things in it that I cannot see. They will admire the composition, they will see subtleties of line, and atmospheric effects, and drawing. They will realise how great pains even a great genius must have bestowed upon it; they will see in it the labour of his love.

They will at last ask themselves how any one could have been so blind, so brutal, so demented, as to scratch or deface such a work of art. They will marvel when it happened and who allowed it to happen. One thing they will not believe, and that is that the artist himself destroyed his own picture.

I was once speaking to a number of children on this point. Children to-day, more fortunate than their elders, are generally taught some kind of handicraft at school. It was getting near Christmas, and I was sure that many, perhaps all, of those children were making some strange little work of art of their own to give, as a surprise, perhaps, to their mothers. I asked them if it were not so, and they eagerly said that it was. I suggested to them that they had spent a great deal of time and trouble over this little thing that they were making; that they had at last made it to their own satisfaction. The time will come when they will present it to their mother. How she will value it! How pleased she will be! How indignant if, after she has put it carefully away, and goes to look at it again, she finds it broken or

defaced! Should such a disaster happen, she will inquire after the perpetrator. She will ask every one in the house who was responsible for such an act—except indeed one person. One person she certainly will not ask or suspect. Who is that? With one accord the children exclaimed "Us!" "You mean," said I, "she would know that the person who had made the thing so beautifully would not be the one to destroy it?" "Yes," they said. Even a child knows that the one who has made a thing beautiful is not the one who proceeds to destroy it.

When the turbine engine was first invented, how well I remember the excitement in the shipping world! Every one was wondering whether it would do all that was expected or whether some trouble would develop which would outweigh the advantages of it. There is great beauty, though it is still strange to some of us to think it, in the power of a mighty engine. The smoothness and the strength of it, its precision, its perfection after its own kind, fill one with delight. If, on the morning of the trial, it was found that the bearings of such an engine had been filled with sand, every one would say—"an enemy has done this!" Certainly no one would be such a fool as to suppose that the inventor or maker had done it!

Yet, when the beauty of the world is marred—beauty a thousand times greater than that of the most perfect engine or the most glorious picture in the world—people will say "how could God do that?" They will look at the twisted body of the cripple, they will turn their eyes from the cancerous, the leprous, the tubercular, and say: "we must be resigned to the inscrutable will of God." Could a

child reason so ill? Does the artist deface his own beauty or the inventor destroy his own work?

I do not profess to have found out the whole answer, and I realise that I must accept the pain of intellectual uncertainty as to the nature of that answer. I will not deny any of the facts. I will not pretend that what is ugly is beautiful, that what is evil is good, or that what is cruel and savage is the will of a loving God. To me all this is dark, and I cannot yet make sense of it. But though I have no complete answer, my reason and my heart alike refuse with finality to explain them by attributing them to God, or by seeing in the Creator of the universe any other power than love.

Beauty is created by love and love alone. This I know. For the rest I must be content to wait.

Chapter V.

The "Fall"

If I try, as I must, to face all the facts, the glory of the world cannot blind me to its horrors. Neither beauty nor joy nor health are perfect. Without being obsessed by the ugliness and pain of things, one cannot ignore their terrible presence. A syphilitic child—a lunatic or a degenerate—these put a sudden question-mark against the world's beauty.

I confess amazement at the glib explanation often offered to me by both Christian and non-Christian witnesses. Pain, they say, is the evidence of our upward struggle, and sin the remains of a former lower state. All struggle involves pain, and the struggle upwards from the ape and tiger to the man is a noble struggle, worth all it costs. We need not, on this explanation, trouble too much about our sins; they were not sins once, but the natural conduct of the beast we are outgrowing.

I agree with all this except the complacency. I believe that we are evolving upwards: I see that the process is painful: I believe it to be worth while. But that this should be regarded as a justification of the whole savage, bloody business called evolution I deny. To begin with, it is not true to say that all struggle involves pain. One can see the strong man rejoicing in his strength and finding in taxing it a physical enjoyment. Moreover, if there is a God,

why did he create us after such a fashion? Why did he choose such an abominable method of improving us? Could he think of no better way of teaching a caterpillar to be a better caterpillar than to invent a diabolical insect which should sting it at its nervous centres, lay its eggs in its soft living body, and leave them to eat their way out? If he, God, created us human beings, why not create us of a better nature than one that must be taught in so brutal a fashion as we are? There are people even here and now who can learn from joy and beauty: why not have made us all altogether like that? Again, there are children of whom parents and teachers will sorrowfully admit that it seems impossible to influence them except by the infliction of physical pain: but what parent would deliberately procreate such a child rather than one amenable to gentleness and love? Or is God so helpless that he *could* not make us other than bestial in our natures, and then was forced to improve us by kicks and blows?

I believe the pains of evolution have been made necessary not by God but by us. I see that they are now necessary: I deny that they always were or always must be. To suppose it is to make of the supreme Power in the universe an impotent being without choice. God could not have chosen to make us so vile that this awful process of pain was necessary from our very nature to make us good. I wonder whether the worst man in the world would have chosen it! Surely no one of average sensibility would. Can we believe it of the Maker of all Beauty? Well, I cannot.

The great Russian novelist, Dostoïevski, put the

case against this method of "vindicating the ways of God to man" in unforgettable language, in a conversation between Ivan and Alyosha of "The Brothers Karamazov." Ivan describes the suffering of little children.

"'I took the case of children only to make my case clearer. Of the other fears of humanity with which the earth is soaked from its crust to its centre, I will say nothing. I have narrowed my subject on purpose. . . . If all must suffer to pay for the eternal harmony, what have children to do with it, tell me, please? It is beyond all comprehension why they should suffer, and why they should pay for the harmony. Why should they, too, furnish material to enrich the soil for the harmony of the future? I understand solidarity in sin among men. I understand solidarity in retribution too; but there can be no such solidarity with children. And if it is really true that they must share responsibility for all their fathers' crimes, such a truth is not of this world and is beyond my comprehension. . . . And so I renounce the higher harmony altogether. It is not worth the tears of one tortured child. . . . It is not worth it, because those tears are unatoned for. They must be atoned for, or there can be no harmony. But how? How are you going to atone for them? Is it possible? By their being avenged? But what do I care for avenging them? What do I care for a hell for oppressors? What good can hell do, if those children have already been tortured? And what becomes of harmony, if there is hell? I want to forgive. I want to embrace. I don't want more suffering. And if the sufferings of children go to swell the sum of suffering which was necessary to pay for truth,

then I protest that the truth is not worth such a price. . . . Tell me yourself, I challenge you—answer. Imagine that you are creating a fabric of human destiny with the object of making men happy in the end, giving them peace and rest at last, but that it was essential and inevitable to torture to death only one tiny creature—and to found that edifice on its unavenged tears, if you consent to be the architect on those conditions ? Tell me, and tell me the truth.' ' No, I wouldn't consent,' said Alyosha softly. ' And can you admit the idea that men for whom you are building it would agree to accept their happiness on the foundation of the unexpiated blood of a little victim ? And accepting it would remain happy for ever ? ' ' No, I can't admit it.' "

I, too, cannot admit it. I, too, will not admit that it is worth while.

If God deliberately inflicted all this on us, he may be God, but I cannot worship him. Indeed, I cannot believe him to be God. It is hard to imagine the artist destroying his own picture or the genius his own invention : it is not hard to imagine an idiot doing so. It would be characteristic of an idiot, of an utterly unstable or degenerate mind. Caliban destroyed for the fun of it, and might quite easily destroy what he had himself made. Not Leonardo da Vinci, not Shakespeare, but an idiot might. Can one look at the universe, with all its flaws, and think it the work of an idiot ?

Something has gone wrong. The groundwork and pattern of creation is of such surpassing beauty as fills the mind with reverence and love ; but all is not well with it. Theologians account for this by seeing it as " fallen." Certainly it is difficult to me,

at least, to believe that it perfectly represents the mind of the Creator. I cannot believe that the scratches on Leonardo's fresco were part of the original design! Plato tells us that the things we see are shadows of what they should be, their "divine pattern" being laid up in heaven. As a Christian, I should put it that the universe no longer perfectly expresses the mind of God, and I, too, believe in a divine pattern of all things. This divine pattern is the intention or the thought of God. As Plato's shadows of the divine pattern perpetually struggle to return and be after that pattern, so do we strive to become what God intended us to be.

The objection urged against this is that science tells us no such thing. It records no fall but a rise, an evolution. It can trace the human race back for half a million years and the world much further; but never does it reach a fall. There is an ebb and flow perhaps; mistakes and disasters in plenty; but no age of perfection followed by a catastrophic fall and then a slow recovery.

Science is to theology what history is to science. If we take the evidence of history alone, we may justly argue that there is no sign of progress at all, and no real evolution. Civilisations rise and fall, and some are nobler than others, but history does not show that this nobility is steadily progressive, or that our western civilisation of the twentieth century has reached a higher level than any which preceded it. If it is better in some things it is worse in others, and the pessimist can make a good case for his pessimism out of the six or seven thousand years of recorded history.

Science shows us progress by taking a wider view.

For thousands of years it substitutes millions, billions, and quadrillions. It invents new terms of measurement and speaks of " light-years." Over its vast record the optimist can look with proud delight and watch humanity evolving upward from the ape to Leonardo, Shakespeare, or St Francis of Assisi.

Theology is to science what science is to history : vaster and nearer to eternal things. History said nothing about evolution : science tells no story of a fall. The fall preceded science. Vast as is the scope of natural science, it still deals with conditions of time and space. Even a light-year can be measured, and the measurements depend on the existence of material things in time-space. Before time-space, was the fall.

I do not know what the " fall " was, or how it happened, or when. It is the old question of the origin of evil. It seems to me, however, glaringly apparent that *something* has gone wrong. We have got off the track. Our pain is due to this fact, and our struggle to the effort to get on to it again. As I have said, effort need not in itself be painful. The idea that all progress is and must be so is one of the pathetic fallacies by which we, unable to escape pain, try to make it bearable. In this we are indeed anthropomorphists, and crude anthropomorphists at that. Much of our progress is accompanied by, and even due to pain, and for that pathetic reason, without noticing what we are doing, we assume that all progress is so. The fact that it is not, even with us, always painful, instead of being joyfully observed as significant and hopeful, is overlooked because we so desperately need some assurance that the pain we do suffer is not for nothing. It is against this kind of

anthropomorphism that we need to be on our guard continually: against the assumption that our own conditions and limitations are of eternal necessity.

But the dawn brightens into day—the spring into summer—buds into flowers and fruit—without suffering. A baby becomes a child, the child's limbs grow, without painful struggle. Caught unawares, away from our theological prepossessions, we admit that this is because such growth is "natural," and do not associate with it the idea of pain.

I once lived in an ancient city where horse-trams survived after their disappearance almost everywhere else. As it was evident, even there, that they must soon be superseded, little trouble was taken to keep the plant in order. Consequently, if any one in the tram blew his nose, the tram leapt off the lines on to the roadway. What happened? The driver shouted and flogged the horses, the horses struggled and strained, the tram jolted and banged, the travellers suffered exquisite discomfort. At last, with gigantic efforts, the wheels were got on to the line again and progress became orderly and easy once more. This homely illustration serves me for an example. The tram, observe, was not intended to stand still, but to advance smoothly and easily. So it would have done, had it kept the track. Having left the track, it still advanced, but with the maximum of effort and discomfort to driver, travellers, and horses.

To me it seems that evolution is part of the plan of God for the universe, though I am not perfectly certain that I do not think this because I am, like other moderns, obsessed with the evolutionary idea and inclined to think it universal and eternal. I do,

however, at present, think of it as being in the mind of God; but as a process without pain, since it is clear that effort can be joyful and enjoyed. I see the element of pain entering in, not because God designed it so, but because we have deviated from his design. I see the process of evolution still continuing —I believe that when we get back to the track we shall be further on than when we left it—but I see why it is no longer swift and joyful and straightforward. The track did not lie through these rough and waste places: it is because we have left the track that we wander in them and suffer.

Our evolution now is more like that of a man recovering from a disease than like that of a healthy child maturing into manhood. A growing child does not need to have its arms and legs stretched painfully on a rack to lengthen and keep them straight. A man suffering from arthritis needs that or something like it. His limbs will sometimes contract until he is obliged to have them straightened by an agonising and painful operation. Is it worth it? Certainly it is worth it, since the patient will often consent to undergo it again and again. He is consoled and strengthened to bear his pain by the knowledge that these often painful and tedious means (which are all that the surgeon or physician now can offer to make him well) aids his recovery. He will even feel the deepest gratitude to the one who inflicts these pains upon him and offer him his thanks for what he has done. But the process is not one of health: it is one of recovery from disease. No physician will call this "natural," or declare that the process of recovery by drugs or scalpel is the way Nature intended us to live.

I believe with the evolutionist that we are making progress, and I agree that, having fallen ill, humanity must now accept the pains and tedium of convalescence. Like the grateful patient of some wonder-working physician, I too thank God for these pains whereby I am—I recognise it—to be goaded and helped along the path of recovery. If, in the end, I do recover, I shall certainly think it worth all the pain. I cannot, nevertheless, be made to believe that God *chose* to make me ill and to recover me by such tragic means. Since I must be anthropomorphical, let me be so here, and stoutly affirm that I will not attribute to my God a cruel stupidity of which I should not be capable myself. I rather believe that he would do as, at my best, I would do myself had I the power; that is to say, he would indeed give us the opportunity to grow and to change, to evolve to something higher than now we are; but it would be a process like the breaking of the dawn, like the opening of a flower, or like—more nearly perhaps—the running of a race by a young man, strong and healthy, to whom the effort that he put forth was in itself a delight.

Why then did God even *allow* such a tragedy as this process of evolution? If we cannot say he ordained it of his own choice, still it must be admitted that he, though omnipotent, has allowed it to happen. If he foreknew the disaster, why did he not prevent it?

I believe that we are once more up against a difficulty of language, due to the difficulty of our thoughts. We speak of "eternity" and "infinity," but we cannot think them, and our inability to do so makes our argument futile where they are pre-

supposed. Where the idea of eternity is concerned, for example, I find myself using the word "foreknew" of God: but to know "beforehand" is already a knowledge in time. It has been said that "God neither remembers nor foresees: he sees." In other words, eternity—of which is God—is neither time standing still, nor time stretched out long, nor time at all, but eternity! How can we argue about the *fore*-knowledge of God when with him there is neither past nor future? Or how base any argument on words we do not in the least understand? I do not see any way out of the difficulty of combining the prescience of God with my free will: but then I realise that prescience is an altogether misleading word to use about God, and that there is no word for what I mean because it is beyond the grasp of my human thought. Eternity is inconceivable to us, and "from an inconceivable conception no logical deduction can be drawn."[1] This, which should be a truism, we continually forget, and act—or think—as though it were not true. So our argument about our own "free will" and the "foreknowledge" of God lacks a logical basis. I continue, with the great majority of mankind, to believe that I and they have some degree of freedom and moral choice. It is interesting to notice that some scientists are inclining to attribute this quality to the lower and even to the lowest forms of life. The parasite, it seems, might once have chosen an independent existence: evolution itself is a process of "trying all things, holding fast that which is good."[2]

[1] "Reality." B. H. Streeter.
[2] "The System of Animate Nature." J. Arthur Thomson.

It would be strange if, just when the amœba and the tape-worm are being credited with the power of choice between habits good and evil, man were to abandon his belief in his own freedom, merely because he is from the very nature of his existence unable to draw a correct logical inference from an inconceivable premise.

The fall, it is suggested by a brilliant if unorthodox thinker,[1] was a fall " into matter." A universe fundamentally spiritual has become material. In this lies all our difficulty and our " sin." Creation no longer perfectly expresses the mind of the Creator : it is not the perfect instrument or temple of the spirit. The divine pattern remains in the mind of God : we no longer perfectly conform to it. We have allowed matter to dominate spirit instead of serving and expressing it.

This view is in keeping with the sacramentalism of Christ, for it accepts his view that material things are neither evil nor illusory, but good and, being good, the channels of God's grace to us. What is wrong is not wrong in itself, any more than evil is real in itself. Neither matter nor spirit is evil, but the relationship between them. We have " fallen into matter " who should have dominated it. The heavens still declare the glory of God and human beings show forth his love in their own. But all is imperfect. There are catastrophes in the heavens and human love falls into a thousand errors.

[1] Origen.

Chapter VI.

The Rise

The fall was a fall into matter: evolution is the reasserting of the power of the Spirit over material things. Matter perfectly informed by spirit—this is our goal. Neither man nor matter are essentially evil but essentially good; therefore redeemable. Matter has got out of place—out of its right relation to spirit. That is the key to the whole problem. This is why we are justified in saying that evil is not real in the sense that good is. It is a question of the relation between them.

Evolution is, therefore, of material things in their relation to the spirit. God is not evolving. The idea that he is, is of a piece with the crude anthropomorphism against which we ought by this time to be on our guard. But no! history repeats itself, and we continue to make God in our own image. A golden calf, a capricious despot, an angry giant, a machine, an evolving or becoming Deity—Christian or heathen, we fall again and again into the same arrogant mistake of creating gods in our own image and worshipping them. In an age in which machinery was first planned and used on a vast scale, men decided that the universe was a piece of machinery. It is true that they expressly excluded God altogether from their mechanical view of life, but by implication they admitted him. It is not possible, after the first

moment of ecstatic admiration, to convince oneself that the greatest machine in the world made itself. Wonderful as the machinery of the nineteenth century was, it was not quite as wonderful as that! God therefore became the supreme mechanic, and man, unable to conceive anything more admirable than the machines he had made, lifted his eyes to the starry firmament and saw machinery there too. The heavens declared the glory of their god.

This phantasy has largely passed, but a new one succeeds. The theory of evolution impresses us with its sublime history and its glorious hope. It *is* glorious. I do not know how any one can hear of it without a lifting of the spirit in hope and expectation. "Now are we the sons of God and it does not yet appear what we shall be." What a distance have we come already! How far may we not hope to travel? No wonder we are intoxicated with this heady wine. God, we enthusiastically affirm, is not to be left out of this enchanting experience. He, too, must evolve. He is not being but becoming—not "I am" but "I shall be." Nothing is final, nothing absolute, nothing at rest. The thought of stillness is dreadful to us; we call it stagnation, and speak scornfully of the goal of a journey whose delight, we insist, lies in the fact that it *is* a journey and that we eternally travel. Quotations from popular writers urging this point of view decorate our walls and take the place of the more old-fashioned Bible-texts. Naïve and anthropomorphic as ever, we refuse to assign to God a rôle so inexpressibly distasteful to ourselves as that of attainment, perfection, or repose.

"The soul of man was made for God and is restless until it finds rest in him." It is because we

have turned away from him that we are restless; because we are without him that rest is abhorrent to us. To us—all imperfect and incomplete—rest would indeed be stagnation. Perhaps we may be forgiven for attributing unrest and change to God himself, so long as we bear in mind that it is indeed essential for us.

God survives our mistakes; but humanity would not easily survive the belief that *it* needed no further pain or unrest or that such pain and unrest was not a good, as things are.

To us, therefore, evolution is good. I marvel that theologians did not recognise in its great hope their own doctrine of redemption. By what strange fatality did they fail to see the gospel of Christ in the story of life as told in our enchanted ears by a Darwin, a Wallace, a Lyell? "Ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord, look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged,"[1] cried the inspired prophet a thousand years ago, and then, with clear eyes and reverent heart, the scientists of the nineteenth century bade us look. The religious turned away their eyes and would have made us all do the like if they could.

I, however, see with awed and expectant eyes the world without form and void; I see the Spirit move on the face of the waters: I see it calling order out of chaos and light out of darkness and life out of death. I see life rising higher and higher in the range of created things, in exact proportion as the Spirit succeeds in reclaiming and redeeming it. Purpose and choice influence the lowest forms of

[1] Isaiah li. 1.

life ; mind dawns in the eyes of the higher animals ; intelligence and spiritual power shine out from the faces of men. Human beings become human just so far as the intelligence rules the body, and art and love are born. The wilderness becomes a garden, the lair of the beast a home, the tribe a nation, paint becomes a picture, noise music. Man has not made any material thing : he has impressed his spirit on things there already. Nothing is changed, yet all is changed. This is evolution.

The animal rises to his feet and becomes human. His eyes no longer look on the ground or search the horizon only for his enemies ; they are lifted to the skies and see beauty. The grey matter of his brain is his instrument, not only to make his living, but to plumb the depths of abstract truth. Spirit becomes more and more to him. Through him the world itself is being ordered. His intelligence has made strides : his spirit lags behind as yet, but it grows. It *must* grow, if his intelligence is not to outgrow and destroy him. Evolution demands the evolution of the spirit, or rather it is the reaffirming of the power of spirit over matter in all things.

I believe this process to be caused by God and the love of God. He did not choose to torture us with unrest. He did not impose pain on us as a means of redemption. He does not " send " disease or war or poverty or loneliness or death. To believe that he does so is to believe that the sun sends shadows. It is not the sun that makes the night, for night is the absence of the sun : it is not God who causes us to suffer, for suffering is the shutting out of God.

The pain of our growth into perfection is not an arbitrary punishment " sent " by God, but an

inevitable consequence. I believe that if we could once really grasp and hold this apparently elementary idea, our salvation would be nearer than when we believed. It is horrible, and in the last degree misleading, to think of God as the source of disease and death, or to speak of these things as his " inscrutable will." It is, if possible, almost more disastrous to think of God as arbitrary and not " lawful to the core "—indeed Law itself. His universe is so—how should not he be ?

If he is the source of being, all things exist in and for him. If we shut him out or leave him, we suffer, as those suffer who leave the sunshine to sit in a cold, dark cellar. It is not the sun that makes them cold ! It is not the sun that makes the darkness ! It is they who deliberately turn away and shut him out. So much freedom we have with God. We *can* —mysteriously we *can*—shut him out or shut ourselves away from him. Not altogether, for if we did so we could not exist. If any one could really shut off the sunlight from the world we should all perish of cold ; but we can shut out the sunshine enough to be very cold indeed ! So can we shut our hearts to God. We cannot, however—here is the limit of our freedom—be well or happy or prosper when we do so. We must suffer. That is natural law and no man can break or change it. It is not an arbitrary punishment inflicted by God, but an inevitable consequence whose cause is in the nature of things.

The suffering that accompanies our progress to God is therefore a relative good to us, because it drives us to him who is our home of joy : but, absolutely, it is an evil for, had we not turned from God, it could not exist.

Chapter VII.

The Trustworthiness of God

We must not either hope or fear to find lawlessness in God. This truth dawned on men long ago. It seemed to them a blessed truth, so far as they could grasp it. It brought them a very natural sense of relief. God, they felt, had improved in his methods of government. Once, in a moment of very natural disgust, he had decided to put an end to the troublesome human race by drowning, but in the end he relented and decided to save eight. Then having drowned all the rest he contemplated the wreck he had made, and decided not to do it again. Henceforth, he said, men might count on not being drowned on so vast a scale; the weather would never again be so catastrophic, and, though there would no doubt be times when he would be angry and would send lightning or a hailstorm, the fundamental laws of Nature would not be broken, and the seasons would follow their due course. Men, counting on this, would find it possible to make provision for their necessities. "While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease." [1]

Men cannot live without seedtime and harvest, and seedtime and harvest depend upon the due

[1] Genesis viii. 22.

appearance of summer and winter, heat and cold. The trustworthiness of God in these matters was therefore not a threat but a promise, and men breathed more easily for this assurance. Looking at the most beautiful thing they had ever seen, they joyfully said that this was a proof that God was trustworthy. "The bow shall be in the cloud and I [God] will look upon it that I may remember the everlasting covenant . . . which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth." [1]

Yet the idea that some room at least must be left for the exercise of caprice on the part of the Almighty remained. It had taken deep root; indeed, it seems embedded in the very rock of our religious thought. The most brilliant and constructive theologians will still ask in shocked tones whether we are to suppose that God is not free to break or to suspend his own laws? The idea that he made them seems to them in some mysterious way to guarantee his willingness to break them. This belief has always seemed to me childish. What it really means is that God must be, and is, at liberty to change his mind. If, however, people boggle at the idea of an Almighty who cannot break his own laws, what shall we think of an All-Wise who needs to change his mind? For this ability to break laws really means just that. The question, therefore, should be differently put: not "Cannot God break his own laws?" but "Can he who is Law itself become lawless? Can he contradict himself?"

Our human laws make hard cases and need exceptions. They can, if need be, be broken, and they often are. That is not so with the laws of

[1] Genesis ix. 16, 17.

Nature or of God. It is indeed a real misfortune that the word "law" ever came to be used in this connection at all. It has only helped to rivet on our minds the senseless idea that the laws of God can be changed, modified, or broken. We see human laws broken every day, evaded, changed, or repealed, and by a trick of thought—half-consciously, half-unconsciously—we transfer this idea to the laws of God. Scientists, had we allowed them, would have taught us differently long ago. A law of Nature cannot be broken, and to speak of breaking it is simply a confusion of language and of thought.

No one can break the law of gravitation though any one can break his neck trying. Yet the knowledge that this is so has not yet been whole-heartedly accepted, and certainly has never deeply impressed our theology.

Here all is still uncertainty and caprice. It is argued that God can, and sometimes will, break his own order or suspend his own laws: in other words, that he can and will change his mind. Put like that it sounds ridiculous, and one is inclined to deny ever having thought anything so childish of the God of whom we recognised long ago that "in him is no variableness, neither shadow cast by turning."[1] If, however, we look at our actions more carefully, it is certain that most of us not only believe that God can change his mind, but have tried hard to make him do so.

How many of our prayers are directed to this very end? We pray for something, and we assume that God would not have given it to us if we had not begged for it. We hope, however, that by our en-

[1] James i. 17.

treaties we shall get him to change his mind on the subject. We may perhaps be fortunate enough to find him in an indulgent mood, or we may succeed in putting our case before him in such a way that he will see (for the first time ?) that we really ought to have what we want. Or he may be moved to pity (not being pitiful by nature ?). Or we may get him to agree to let us have the thing we want, if we consent to give up something else that we do not want quite so much.

All this simply means that we want God to change his mind, and we hope that we can persuade him to do so. We remind him of things we feel he may have forgotten. We point out merits in ourselves that he may have overlooked. Yet we are shocked if any one accuses us of worshipping a capricious God, and say that we, for our part, are prepared to be resigned to his inscrutable will—using the word "inscrutable" to cover the real accusation of caprice.

When, therefore, scientists first succeeded in convincing us—more or less—that no one could break the laws which govern the universe, the result was a fit of depression. By various processes of magic, by ritual, incantations, sacrifices, and spells, men have tried from the beginning of the world to obtain just this power; but now, if the scientist is right, it is clear that it can never be achieved at all. Nothing—not even knowing the right word, using the right magic, or praying the right prayers — *nothing* can change the changeless order of things — if the scientist is right.

Some decided to believe that he was wrong and should be silenced. Others held that he was right,

and that there was no hope for mankind. Men, like the stars, moved in obedience to unchangeable law and were no more than tiny little cogs in a terrific and uncontrollable machine.

The process did not stop there. Scientists had hardly convinced us that we could not break natural laws than political economists began to urge us to take the same view of economic laws. They had a much more rapid success, the way having been paved for them by the scientist. Their success made many people as despondent about human affairs as they had already become about the world of nature. Again it seemed that "laws which never could be broken" meant helplessness for humanity; and that, whatever was wrong in the world of industry, commerce, and finance, being wrong in obedience to mysterious and unbreakable laws, must remain wrong for ever.

Before our very eyes the same thing is happening to-day in another sphere of knowledge. Psychologists, having established the fact that not only Nature and economics are lawful, affirm that even that apparently most capricious of all things, human nature, is so. Cause and effect are with us again, and we are what we are—nervous, unstable, or insane, extraverts or introverts—in obedience to fixed laws of causation which we cannot modify or escape. Since this is so, we cannot change ourselves, and must be resigned to be as and what we are. We cannot help ourselves, and there is no help for us.

It is a pity that neither economists nor psychologists have reminded us, or even always realised themselves, that law is the very condition of liberty.

Natural science has been teaching us this tremendous truth all the time.

While people were still engaged in denouncing scientists as liars, or throwing dust on their own heads and bewailing their deplorable fate, science was setting them free and giving them a mastery over their little home, the Earth, which they had never dreamed of in the days of magic and spell. Of course this has its tragic side, but to that later generation to which I belong I must confess that it sometimes seems to me to be exceedingly comic too. A poet complains—

> " Streams do not turn aside
> The just man not to entomb,
> Nor lightnings curb their pride
> To give his virtues room.
> The world is what it is, for all our dust and din." [1]

Unmoved by the dust and din, modern science, by the study of natural law, taught us to irrigate, to dam, to regulate and to direct the mighty streams of Niagara and the Nile. Over the buildings once protected by consecrated bells with texts from the Bible carved upon them is erected the lightning conductor; and lightnings curb their pride to give our virtues room. To the indignation of the theologian and the terror of the superstitious, science replied, not with despair but with the calm of strength, that the world is indeed what it is " for all our dust and din."

The triumphs of science during the last and present centuries need no recitation here. It would be a weariness even to mention them. What, however, has not yet been clearly realised is that science has

[1] Matthew Arnold : " Empedocles on Etna."

not only enabled us to fly in the air, to dive under the sea, to combat disease, or to produce wealth on a scale undreamed of, but it has changed our whole attitude to material things. It has taught us that mind dominates matter. It has set forward the whole process of evolution, which consists in just this realisation and the development that follows it.

The history of our evolution as a race has hitherto been one of fitting ourselves to the planet on which we live. In obedience to its conditions of place and climate, humanity has learned to adapt its life. Changes of climate have driven men to and fro over the face of the earth, north, south, east, and west. Outbreaks of disease have forced men to develop immunity to them, and the process has often been at a terrific cost. Men have learned to live in climates and in conditions which have taken from them all but their humanity, and left even that almost unrecognisable. I remember seeing in the house of Sir Harry Johnston a number of brilliant little sketches of some of the people he had met in Central Africa. Small in stature and with long arms reaching below their knees like gorillas, with retreating brow and heavy jowl, it took some faith to believe that they were human at all in the sense that Darwin was human. The aborigines of the Bush country of Australia or of the river banks of Tierra del Fuego survive indeed, and are recognised as human: but though they have succeeded so far in the struggle for survival, their success has been due to an almost blind submission to forces they did not even hope to control, and evolution in the sense of progress seems almost to have ceased for them. These hardly-human beings have no knowledge of natural law,

and " nature " to them is as capricious as God to the modern religious person who submits to his " inscrutable will." The savage tries to control or at least to influence Nature by magic, as Christians have tried to change the mind of God by prayers. When they failed they were resigned—because they had to be. Caprice means slavery.

On the other hand, law is liberty. At the very moment when men were complaining that scientific law made them mere helpless cogs in the universal machine, scientists were showing them how to make the world what they chose. The modern man, obliged or desirous to live where " white men cannot live," is not in the least inclined to go on living —and dying—there for, say, ten thousand years, in the hope that by that time he will have become immune to the yellow-fever, the malaria, or the ague, that infests it. Nor does he propose to sacrifice his other evolutionary gains in the mere struggle to survive. Without realising how stupendous a change his action implies, he calmly proceeds to fight the disease or to change the climate.

This is not an exaggeration. More than one " white man's grave " has been transformed into a health-resort by the application of modern science. Climates have been modified, rainfall secured, the desert irrigated, without the breaking of a single natural law. Yellow-fever no longer destroys the white inhabitants of the Isthmus of Panama, vast areas in India and the Soudan have been rescued from famine. The Middle-West of North America, which once afforded a precarious living to a few hundred thousands of Red Indians—so precarious that an unusually hard winter would kill off thou-

sands of them—now bears crops which feed a hundred and ten million Americans and half the world besides. Before our eyes the prophecies of the Old Testament have been fulfilled. "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad of them, and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose . . . for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the glowing sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water." [1]

All this has happened while we were engaged in protesting that if we might not change or break natural laws we were helpless! Protesting their impotence and cursing the scientist, men learned that they need no longer adapt themselves to the world; that evolution for them had taken on a new aspect; that henceforth they were to adapt the world to themselves. This is the miracle of miracles to some of us—that law and liberty—nay, mastery—are one. It is because the scientist is able to rely on the existence of unchanging laws that he has such power. Every theory he invents, every experiment he makes, depends for its importance and meaning on his belief that there is law in the universe. He believes that water, gas, steam, electricity, and all natural forces act always in the same way in the same conditions. If they did not, or if he was in doubt about their doing so, he would be paralysed. He can teach us how to use the force of Niagara to generate the electricity which lights and warms half a continent, because water and electricity obey their own laws and in no circumstances whatever fail to do so. If water were suddenly to run uphill,

[1] Isaiah xxxv. 1, 6, and 7.

it would not run to any purpose as far as we are concerned! We should be helpless to use it. We should once more, like savages, be reduced to magic or to resignation. Only because water obeys unchangeable law, can we make use of it.

Why, then, do men bewail the relentlessness of Nature? Why are they reduced to despair by the discovery that they cannot change or break her laws? It is time we realised that only this "relentlessness" makes our freedom possible. Contrast the attitude of the savage towards Nature with that of the scientist. The one, with all his hopes of bribing, deceiving, or compelling Nature to help him, is terrified of her and helpless before her: the other, who has given up once and for all any idea that he can induce her to change, finds himself possessed with powers that seem miraculous. Her service is perfect freedom, and this freedom we are now entering on because we give a more intelligent service.

Realising this, I believe that the relentlessness of Nature is beneficent. At least it seems to me quite perverse to think it cruel, since in practice it turns out to be the only thing which makes it possible for us to profit by her powers and escape her dangers. If there exists an enormous reservoir of wealth and energy, and we find ourselves able to use it because we know its laws and can trust them never to fail or to let us down; if we find that those who do not believe in these laws and think of Nature as capricious are able to make hardly any use of this wealth and these energies—is it not reasonable to conclude that the power behind Nature which ordered her being and created her law is not only not cruel but not

indifferent? Actually friendly? I no longer call Nature relentless: I call and think of her as trustworthy. I believe the God whom she reveals to be trustworthy. If I no longer hope anything, neither do I fear anything, from his caprice. I am sure he cannot change; I think it senseless to talk about his breaking his own laws. I realise that he is Law itself, and I find that that law is necessary to my freedom and the very condition of my evolution. In fact, I find that law is love.

Looking at the world I live in, and at myself who live in it, I cannot help believing that something has gone wrong. I ask myself how I could have wished it to be set right except by the process of desiring rightness and suffering from wrongness; and of learning by experience how to achieve this end. I look with anguish of heart at the cost—the tragic cost—of the process, but I see no other possible way. That God can endure us and our sufferings and our stupidity is to me the last and overwhelming proof of his love. If I were to see a worm or a beetle suffer, I should not trouble myself to do more than put it out of its misery. Compassion would go as far as that but not further. I would not treat a dog so, or a child. A dog I would allow to suffer a good deal while I was trying to pull him round. A child I would not "put out of its misery" at all. Is not this because I care for the dog and the child, but not for the worm? And for the child more than the dog? "If ye then being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven" have endless patience even with our pain?

Chapter VIII.

Science and Faith

The most striking example of the truth that faith removes mountains is to be found in the application of science. Science is faith in a majestic scale.

All that I have written about universal law or the unity of nature is based on faith. It is surprising that so few people even now realise this. Even students of science will seriously assure me that they can believe nothing that they cannot prove, and draw mournful comparisons between themselves and students of theology on this matter.

Surely they should know by now that they can prove nothing? No man can prove that he exists. No man can prove that the universe exists. How then can any man prove that it is obedient to universal law?

No scientist ever has proved this. No scientist has ever proved the existence of any law. If laws exist it is probable that none has yet been correctly stated. But it is not yet proved that there *are* laws, or that there is any relation whatever between what we call "cause" and "effect." Chantecler believed that the sun rose because he crowed, for, in fact, he always crowed and the sun always rose. Yet he was mistaken.

Scientists, therefore, are called upon to make a stupendous act of faith. They must believe that the

universe does exist and that it is lawful to the core. To believe that it exists is easy: in spite of argument, it is, for our human minds, wholly impossible to believe that it does not exist! But to believe that it is subject to law—that is a stupendous generalisation. Scientists make it by an act of faith, and according to their faith it has been unto them. They now cheerfully move mountains, and say not merely to one sycamine tree but to a forest, "be thou plucked up by the root and be thou planted in the sea"—and it is done. Their faith requires them to act continually and dangerously on beliefs they cannot prove. St Paul's celebrated list could be doubled and trebled to meet the case of heroic scientific believers. How little they have to go upon! The greatest scientist in the world makes his observation and states his theories standing on a minute little planet in a universe of unimaginable greatness and helped by other observers equally handicapped. Their united experience covers a period of a few thousand years, the human race itself being perhaps half a million years old. What a minute laboratory for observers of the universe! And what instruments! Five senses, continually liable to be deceived, and a mind dependent on their communications! It is laughable. Some of the most amusing games of children are illustrations of some ludicrous optical delusion. And at this very hour scientists are beginning to declare that they do not know where they are going or what the universe really is. Do they in fact know more about the universe than you and I know about God? Can they prove its existence or its laws any better or more clearly than we can prove him and his laws?

The answer must be no : yet there is one respect in which the student of science is justified in his boasting. He believes what he cannot prove, as the theologian does : but he acts on his belief, as the theologian very often does not. In fact, instead of being less a man of faith he is probably more so ; for it is not really faith to say, for example, that we believe in a God of Love and then act as though we did not. The scientist will perhaps not even say that he believes in universal law, having no means of proving its existence ; but he acts as though he believed it. Is that not the very test of faith ?

We confuse faith and superstition. The humorist's definition of faith which makes it consist in " believing what you know ain't so " is really a perfect definition of superstition. I should like to say " faith is believing what *is* so," or, in other words, it is faith to believe what is true and superstition to believe what is false. But this would not be fair, since real faith has sometimes been put in what afterwards was shown to be a mistake. I will say, therefore, that faith is belief which acts on what it believes until it is shown to be untrue : while superstition continues to believe without acting and regardless of any such showing. Faith is always open-eyed, adventurous, forward-looking : superstition, confronted with a fact that does not fit its theory, refuses to examine the fact and is angry with it for existing and with you for pointing it out.

In this sense, certainly, the scientist is the man of faith. If, with Chantecler, much experiment has convinced him that the sun rises when he crows, he will believe also (or act as though he believed) that it rises *because* he crows. He will, however, then make

further experiments and watch to see whether the sun will rise if he does *not* crow. Finding that it does, he abandons his belief. Nothing has been more impressive than the spirit in which scientists, brought up and committed to a Newtonian theory of the universe, listened to the expositions of Einstein. Such faith as this is the basis of all scientific power. Our mastery over material things depends on it entirely. If there is no law—if cause and effect do not exist—if there is no unity in Nature—then no experiment is valid and no knowledge possible. Niagara may at any moment turn back and reascend the falls. Chaos is with us again, and we know nothing and can do nothing. Science can never be applied because it cannot exist.

The scientist is a pragmatist. So was Christ. With the utmost humility I accept the creed as at least a working hypothesis. I am a pragmatist too. The late Dean of Carlisle on my confessing to him this dreadful heresy, indignantly said that pragmatism consisted in " believing anything that paid." I replied that it is believing in anything that works. Broadly speaking, I do believe this. I believe, without being able to prove, that two and two make four, and I find that I can work my sum. If I believe that two and two make five I cannot work it. Accordingly I continue to believe that they make four. If I shall find some day that there is some mysterious sense in which two and two make infinity, or make nothing, I shall try to adapt my life and faith to this discovery. In the meantime I realise the possibility of its being made, and I believe that this does not prevent two and two from making four in some

cases, and that these are the cases with which I have at present to deal. On this I act.

What I, who am not even a student of science, see as a consequence of this faith in universal law is mastery over material things, confidence in the power of man to deal with and solve the difficulties of life on this material world, readiness to risk death for a theory and give a whole life to the study of one which may be found mistaken in the end. I see, too, that to this sublime faith the promises of Christ have been fulfilled, and that on the material plane men have indeed worked greater works than he.

It is thrilling to hear a lecture on scientific progress to-day, not only because of the achievements recorded and described, but because of the mental attitude of the scientist. While he admits that we are only at the beginning of things and that the problems and difficulties before us are huge, he *expects* to conquer them. If not in this generation, yet in another. The things that now are impossible to us will become possible. At least we do not know what our limitations are, and confidently expect in the coming years to pass those which we now accept for the moment. We can live—we whites—in the Isthmus of Panama without catching yellow-fever. Shall we ever live at the North Pole or on the Equator? Who knows? Not I—nor any man.

We have converted the Middle-West of America and the far less promising plains of Canada into granaries of wheat. Shall we at last gather a profitable harvest of some sort from the sands of the Sahara or the snows of the North Pole? Who knows?

We have abolished some diseases from some parts of the world. Shall we some day abolish them all, everywhere?

We have learned to harness Niagara, and are trying our hand on the tides of the terrible sea. Shall we some day harness the earthquake and the volcano? Who knows? Again, not I, nor any man. The scientist will not say that any of these miracles is impossible. It is only impossible—to-day.

These "mighty works," however, I shall be told, are not like Christ's, for they make no claim to be "miracles," nor can we believe that "miracles" really happen. It is childish to think it. If our ancestors had seen an aeroplane in flight a hundred years ago, they would have said it was a miracle! Yes—and they would have been right. No one then had sufficient knowledge of or belief in scientific law to be able to fly: consequently, if any one had flown it would, in the narrowest sense of the word, have been a miracle. No one did fly, for miracles in this sense do not happen. If, however, savages in the Australian Bush see some one flying overhead to-day, no doubt they mentally explain the matter in words which imply a miracle, and have no difficulty in accepting the explanation because they have no idea of natural law.

We, however, see aviators and do not attribute to them miraculous powers, because, though most of us know nothing about the laws of flight, we know there *are* laws and that the aeroplane is flying in obedience to them. Somebody, if not we ourselves, knows how it is done, and so it is not a miracle.

Yet the word "miracle" is not banished from

our lips. We still speak of " the miracle of spring," and other miracles of Nature's working, and our language is not false. Though the scientist may modify our climate and our spring, or teach us how to grow a harvest where none grew before—may, in fact, tell us " how to do it "—he cannot tell us why the seed grows or what life is. Nature is still a mystery to us. The greater the scientist, the humbler is his recognition of the fact that he is ignorant. Life and growth are no less a miracle to him than to the poet. It is a vulgar mind which thinks that mystery and miracle have left the earth because in some cases we now know how to work the miracle. In truth it is as mysterious as ever to the mind that can see beneath the surface.

Chapter IX.

Miracles

Christ is reported to have cured a number of lepers. Modern hygiene, cleanliness, and sanitation have abolished leprosy altogether from a large part of the world. There are still lepers even in England, but they have brought their infection from abroad, and they are few in number. No one now dreams of building a leper church or even of providing a squint in the wall of a church that lepers may look through and join in the worship. It was quite common to do this in the Middle Ages. Doctors, I am told, cannot quite account for the disappearance of leprosy, which has not been due to any one spectacular discovery of a cure or a preventive. It has followed a general improvement in the standard of cleanliness and hygiene, and presumably has been the result of it.

When Christ healed one leper it was called a miracle. When we abolish leprosy no one dreams of using such a word. Why? What is a miracle?

Most people think of a miracle as an event which involves a breaking of natural law. It is, they say, one of those cases in which God breaks his own laws. If it can be shown that no natural law was broken, then the event is not called a miracle. So faith-healing, which was once regarded as miraculous, is now not regarded in this light. "We know how

it is done," people say : it may be much more rare than is claimed, but at least in some cases (often believed to be " only nervous ") healing by faith is admitted to be a possibility, and is called suggestion or auto-suggestion or psychotherapy or some other more or less scientific name. The interesting point about it, however, is that it is not now said to be miraculous, because it does not involve any breach of natural law, and " we know how it is done."

Of course we do not really " know " in any complete sense, but we do know that no law is broken, and we have, or some of us have, a rough idea " how it is done."

So also we do not think of the abolition of leprosy as a miracle because, though again we do not know how it happened, we are quite clear that it happened according to natural law and involved no breach of such law.

For my part, I believe that nothing has ever happened that did break natural law. I find it quite impossible to believe that God could contradict himself or change or become lawless. A miracle to me is not the breaking of law : it is the operation of forces whose laws we do not understand.

The moment we understand the law, we cease to call its operation miraculous. That is the whole difference between Christ healing a leper and hygiene abolishing leprosy. It is obviously a far greater achievement to get rid of leprosy altogether than to heal even a hundred or a thousand lepers. No one can seriously doubt that, if he stops to think for a moment. No one need be staggered any more by the amazing promise of Christ recorded in the fourth

Gospel[1]: "The works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do." Where we have believed, with him, in the trustworthiness of things, we have succeeded, just as he said we would. Where we have not believed (and we never have believed yet in the trustworthiness of God) we have not succeeded.

Yet Christ himself gave us the clue. If, he said, you build a house on the sand, it will fall down. Why? Because God attaches some particular sanctity to sand and would punish us if we disregard it? Not at all: but because sand is a bad foundation.

If, said a more primitive writer, you eat the fruit of a certain tree you will die. Why? Because (he says) that tree specially and more than other trees belongs to God, and if you touch it he will be angry and will kill you.

Is there not here all the difference that separates the savage from the scientist? To the one, suffering and death are arbitrary punishments for wicked conduct: to the other, they are the inevitable consequences of folly. Christ did not say that the man who built on an unsuitable foundation was a wicked man; he said he was a fool. We, however, persist in ignoring his warning. We build our lives, our cities, our states, in defiance of all spiritual law, and are childishly surprised when they fall down. Our intentions being (in our judgment) excellent, would not a God of Love, we ask, have averted the consequences of our acts? Could he not "work a miracle" to save us? Did not Christ do so?

No—he did not. That is to say, he did nothing that involved any breaking of law. To do that

[1] John xiv. 12.

would not be kind—it would be cruel, for our only safeguard is the trustworthiness of Nature. It is our condition of freedom. Unless we can rely on it we are as helpless as savages before a thunderstorm. Let us rid ourselves for ever of the idea that God would be doing us a kindness if he would only, now and then, give Nature a little push, this way or that, in order to save us from some catastrophe. To do so would be to wreck our security and take from us at one stroke the power to conquer Nature and all her catastrophes: for this power depends for its very existence on our assurance that we can depend on natural laws.

What then did Christ do when he worked "miracles"? Precisely what we do. He brought some further power or energy into play.

Here is an example of the working of miracles by science which illustrates my argument.

Sound travels very slowly. When sounds are broadcast they travel round the world more quickly than light. The striking of Big Ben travels so slowly that even at the distance of half a mile the listener-in hears the last stroke through his headphones while the fifth or sixth is still booming slowly in through his window. What has happened? Has the B.B.C. broken the laws of sound? No, it has introduced a new power—that of electricity. The sound is converted into electricity, which travels enormously faster than sound, flashed through space, and reconverted into sound by the receiving apparatus. No law has been broken, yet sound is sent across space and heard almost at the moment that it sounded.

If Christ did mighty works[1] also, he did them in

[1] For the sake of clearness, let me say here that I believe he did.

obedience to universal law. Any other theory involves the possibility of God having to change his mind because some unforeseen need arose which he had not provided for beforehand—a thing I find not difficult to believe but impossible.

If he healed the sick, raised the dead, and calmed the storm, the power by which he did so must be a power subject to law. We call it the power of God, and God is the source of law. The more we associate Christ with divinity the more certain it is that he was no breaker of law. When, however, people argue that he either broke the law or did not work the miracle, they seem to me to be assuming a knowledge of law far beyond anything that the wisest of us possesses. In vain do scientists protest that "the vast ocean of truth lies all unexplored before them." We continue to argue as if we knew not only a great deal but everything! Every year adds both to our knowledge and to our consciousness of ignorance. Scientists were never more able to increase our knowledge and control of energy or more perplexed about the nature of energy itself. The same is true of matter. Yet people discuss the miraculous as though they knew all the powers of the universe and their laws!

Consider Christ's works of healing. A century ago the sceptic was as sceptical about the healing miracles as now about the nature miracles. People, it seems, were not then aware that one patient's faith in his doctor is a definite factor in his recovery; and another's medicine made more efficacious by being dark in colour and horrible in taste. They did not know the difference between nervous and other diseases, or realise that mental means can do a great

deal in the former class of case. To-day the whole attitude of such people is changed. It has become positively fashionable to believe either in faith-healing or at least in healing by means other than material. Nancy and Salpêtrière, the faith-healer, the new thinker, or the quack, the psycho-analyst and the neurologist—all, intelligent and learned or merely credulous and ignorant, are at one in believing that there is something more than material means in the matter of healing, and that, in fact, in some cases the mental factor is all. We do not know very much more now than then which cases these are, or what are "nervous diseases." These are difficult questions, and the younger generation of doctors is slow to dogmatise about them. But how far we have travelled from the point of view of those who scoffed at the very idea of faith-healings and ruled them out of the Gospel story as miraculous and therefore incredible! Now the emphasis is different. The miracles of healing were exaggerated by the evangelists no doubt, we are told, but so far as they did happen they were not miracles! Coué and a score of others know "how to work" those miracles.

The religious, on the other hand, are apt to respond with indignation or with a dreadful doubt. Were the miracles of Christ, I am constantly asked, due only to suggestion? Or hypnotism? Or animal magnetism affecting the patient? What do you mean by "only"? Christ healed people. He said that we ought to be able to do the same.[1] He was astonished and even indignant when his friends failed to do so.[2] He said that they would in the end do it more effectively

[1] Matthew x. 8.; Luke ix. 2. [2] Matthew xvii. 20.

than he—probably on a larger scale if they "believed on him." [1] By "believing on him" I take it that he meant believing and sharing his view of life. He promised his disciples the Spirit of Truth who should lead them on into all truth. When we show some signs of doing what he said, seeking the truth, using our powers, consecrating our intelligence, it appears that we do in fact begin to make progress. Powers we have neither understood nor thought of are discovered by us, and we are learning how to heal all sorts of diseases. But instead of rejoicing at the fulfilment of his promise to us, we ask in shocked tones whether Christ "only" healed by these means?

I do not know by what means he healed; but I should say from the evidence that his presence created a profound impression on the sick and his vitality helped theirs. I should say he had great magnetism, great love, and a unique understanding of the minds of men. I should say that he was a psychologist of unsurpassed genius, and that he therefore knew and was able to use powers which most of us do not in the least understand. I would add that, in spite of all this, there were people (and I think ills) that he could not cure.[2] Have I now lessened the mystery or the miracle? Not at all. It is as mysterious as before—as mysterious as the life which quickens the seed and brings the harvest. Yet it seems that my view is rejected both by the scientist and the theologian! The scientists triumphantly observe—"then Jesus did *not* work miracles!" The theologian feels that I have hopelessly confused natural and supernatural events or natural and spiritual laws.

[1] John xiv 12. [2] Mark vi. 5.

I admit that I am not able to make this distinction and I do not really understand it. Do they? Let me put the matter in this way: scientists, by close observance of and obedience to the laws of Nature, are able to heal many diseases. To any one who believes in God these laws are simply God's laws. Christ, by close knowledge of and perfect obedience to the laws of God, healed the sick. If any one says that he did it not by obedience to the law of God but by breaking it, I think he is not proving but disproving the divinity of Christ. And since all laws and energies that make for life and health and beauty are the laws of God, I expect the work of the scientist, who pursues knowledge along one path, to be in accordance with the will of God, and not different except in method from the obedience of Christ to other and even more mysterious laws of whose operation we are still largely ignorant.

If, by long thought, perseverance, and love of the truth, we succeed in working miracles also, we do what Christ himself promised we should do. Does this make him a liar? Or lessen our awe and love of him? Or enable us to "explain" the miracle?

With the history of spiritual healing before me, I shall not suppose that I know what powers there may yet be in the world awaiting our discovery and use. I think those people exceedingly unscientific who do so. What did a former generation of scientists know of atomic energy? They did not even know of its existence. What does the present generation know of its laws? Not enough to enable us to use it. Are we to assume that there are no other forms of energy than those we know, or that we know exactly and forever what can and what cannot

be achieved by those we do know? It is laughable to suppose it; and yet highly intelligent and scientific people do suppose it, or reason as though they supposed it, with the complacency of the most dogmatic theologian who ever burnt his opponent at the stake.

Miracles, they will say, with a shake of the head or a smile, do not happen. No—in the sense of law-breaking, I am persuaded they do not happen. Therefore, they will go on to say, Christ never calmed the storm nor raised the dead. Indeed? Will you, who are a scientist, declare in your present state of knowledge that you can dogmatise so easily? Can you explain to us—do you know yourself—what spirit is? What mind and matter are? Are energy and matter the same thing? Or mind and matter? Do you really know already exactly which is which and what is what, and what are the exact limitations of the power of mind or spirit over matter, who neither know what mind nor matter nor spirit are at all?

Spirit or mind can influence the body—a material thing. It can even make the difference between life and death. The weakness which the body might have endured without disaster for many years will kill under the influence of a shock. Life and health may come back with happiness. So a material thing like the body is actually altered by spiritual means. Do we yet *know* at what point spiritual power ceases? We—who know so little?

Material things, including the body but also the world at large, are altered by the minds of men. Scientific genius changes the face of the earth, curbs rivers, moves mountains. Is any one really in a

position to be sure that he understands this process perfectly and is able to define its limitations? What! In the face of the achievements of the last century and this? It is incredible! The ocean of truth lies unexplored before us.

The idea that mind and matter are quite different things is fast disappearing. Unfortunately, the word "spirit" is still less defined or understood. I must therefore use words whose meanings are shifting all the time, to clothe my belief: but I must take the risk of being very clumsy.

Let me then say, boldly and even with repetition, that I do not understand the difference which some seem to see so clearly between the nature miracles of Christ and the healing miracles. I believe that he did exercise an extraordinary power over nature, and I believe that this power over what we call "natural catastrophes" was exercised in precisely the same way and by the same means as his power over the human body. If I am accused of confusion, I reply that it is not I that am confused, but the universe which is so *one* that, when we distinguish between mind and matter, or mind and spirit, we distinguish blindly.

Was it the body or the mind or the spirit of Joan of Arc which unsheathed swords, fired guns, wielded armies, and changed the history of Europe?

The insensate greed of men has cut down forests of valuable timber without troubling to replant. The result has been a barren land or devastating floods. Terrible damage to property and much loss of life have lately been caused by such floods in the Middle-West of America. Has this material harm been due to the material acts of cutting down trees, or to the

intellectual stupidity which could not foresee the consequences, or to the moral faults of greed to make money and indifference to the losses of others? To all of them together? No doubt. In fact they belong together and to try to separate them is silly.

War devastated huge areas of Europe—destroyed farms and orchards and massacred men. Was it the guns that did this? Or the scientific genius which invented them? Or the greed and fear of men which set genius to work on this destructive business? Were the means material, intellectual, or spiritual?

All three of course: yet is it not most true—the deepest kind of truth—to say that the disaster of war is due to spiritual causes? Without the hatreds and fears of men to move them, scientists would not care to devote their intelligence to these means of destruction. If they had done so, it would not have mattered—no one would have used them—but, again, for the hatreds of men. Am I not right, therefore, in saying that the true cause of all this destruction was hatred? War is the perfect expression of hate. It shows hatred to be what it is—the principle of destruction. It is altogether negative: it makes nothing, it destroys all, even itself. Love—its opposite—creates, and is the principle of creation. Look at the pictures of war painted by any great artist—Mr Nevinson, for instance. Are they not pictures of destruction? There are no living trees, no harvests, no flowers, no beauty, almost no life. Death and destruction wipe out everything. Even colour is gone, and mud-coloured men march across the mud-coloured plains once rich with the beauty of harvest and flowers. Contrast this picture of hate with Keats's great poem of love.

"I have even thought that it might bless
The world with benefits unknowingly;
As does the nightingale, upperched high,
And cloister'd among cool and bunched leaves—
She sings but to her love, nor e'er conceives
How tiptoe Night holds back her dark-grey hood.
Just so may love, although 'tis understood
The mere commingling of passionate breath,
Produce more than our searching witnesseth:
What I know not: but who, of men, can tell
That flowers would bloom, or that green fruit would swell
To melting pulp, that fish would have bright mail,
The earth its dower of river, wood, and vale
The meadows runnels, runnels pebble-stones,
The seed its harvest, or the lute its tones,
Tones ravishment, or ravishment its sweet
If human souls did never kiss and greet?"

If this sounds to you fantastic, turn back to the pictures again. When the hatred of men broke out in war, did the flowers bloom or the seed find its harvest? Did not hatred destroy all these things?

When war at last extinguished itself in its own ruins, love came back and began its work. Grass began to grow on the graves, men rebuilt their houses, farmers sowed their crops. Love restores, orders, and creates. If hate grows stronger than love, all this is lost again in another war.

My point is that, below the material means, below the intellectual genius of men, are spiritual motives, and causes, and laws, deeper, more powerful and more mysterious than the others, which Christ knew and understood. He called out energies we hardly know by name and brought them into operation. He knew, as no one else has ever known, that love creates and hate destroys. Seeing, as even I can

do, the terrible results of hatred, and knowing that men's hearts are easily filled with hate, I cannot wonder that the world is full of—at present—inexplicable catastrophes. How many harmless and religious people at this hour are attributing to God the floods which have destroyed their homes and the lives of people they love? But we know that divine love did not send these floods, but human greed.

How many, simpler still, attribute to God the deaths of their sons in war or by disease? Nations live together in defiance of all the laws of God and the result is war. Cities are built, and people live in them, in defiance of the laws of hygiene, and the result is disease. Still we refuse to see the spiritual causes—greed and hate and fear—which bring about our material disasters.

If we could get only so far as this—that we attribute disasters to their true causes where these causes are so plain to see, I believe we should go on from thence to a point from which we should be able to see the operation of more mysterious laws still, and to exercise more mighty powers over the world in which we live. The scientist, by his glorious love of truth, has taught us that we need not be afraid of comets or eclipses, and goes on to show us how to avoid or to control floods, famine, and disease. Christ demonstrated to us powers more startling still.

This was because he saw deeper into truth and called forth energies we neither recognise nor control. Seeing the true cause of what we still call "natural catastrophes" gave him mighty powers over the effect. Is that incredible? It is not so to me.

As I believe that Christ saw into the minds and hearts of those who came to him for healing, and knew both whom he could heal and how, so I believe he saw far beyond that—into the disorders of nature and knew what he could order and how far. And he knew, too, that, just as the scientist can achieve his great victories over nature only when men as a whole are willing to believe him, so was it with himself. "He could there do no mighty works because of their unbelief," but, when all or most of us believe, "greater works than these shall we do." When, therefore, I read that he raised the dead and stilled the storm, I see in this the operation of forces I know not even by name: I see no breaking of law. Nowhere does Christ play the conjurer, pretending to some unique power he and he alone could use. He never said that he worked miracles because he had access to such powers as others had not, or because he was God and others only men. He never brought this claim into his working of miracles at all. He said that he was using powers which every one ought to be able to use and would, as the world progressed, use on a greater and greater scale. This is the attitude of the scientist—not the conjurer. I thank the Christian Scientist for teaching me that word! "Christ Scientist"—it is a glorious phrase. And it is also true. The whole teaching of Christ was scientific in spirit. There are no arbitrary punishments, no exceptional powers, no esoteric doctrine here. All is for all. The obstacles to health, beauty, and joy lie not in the mind of a capricious God who chooses to give help to one and deny it to another: they lie in ourselves; in the laziness that likes resignation better than action, the silliness that

admires caprice rather than law, the cowardice that takes no risks, the ignorance that likes itself better than wisdom. Christ warned us against all these things, but we do not believe him. And "he can do no mighty works because of our unbelief."

Chapter X.

God's Universal Love

The declaration that God is Love is an abstract statement. It contains the very heart of Christianity, for the heart of every religion is its idea of God: and it is this idea of God which makes the value of Christianity to us. Perhaps it is natural that, from its very importance and its world-wide appeal, it is in understanding the love of God that we are most inclined to be anthropomorphic. Certainly it seems to me that the Christian religion has up to now failed to teach us what is meant by infinite or universal love. God's love is supposed to work by fits and starts and to be exceedingly capricious. Such expressions as "a chosen people," "raised up," or "sent" by God, a "special providence," express this idea. Some people believe that God liked the Jews better than other people, and so sent his Son in the form of a Jew: the Jews rejected him, and God thereupon deposed them from their specially privileged position. Some go on to declare that he now likes the British better than any other people, and the only consistent attempt that I know of to defend him from a charge of changing his mind is that made by the British-Israelites, who seek to prove that the British are Israelites (the lost ten tribes) and so vindicate the consistency of God.

I do not care whether or not we are the ten lost

tribes, because I do not believe that God loves some nations better than others. I do not find that a possible thing to believe of a Love which is infinite. I believe that God loves all nations and all people equally. And I do not think that his love is increased by our goodness or diminished by our badness, but that it is always the same and always perfect.

We ourselves cannot help liking some people better than others, though even we sometimes deplore the fact that we cannot regulate our love for our friends in proportion to their solid worth. In our parents we may even see something like the reckless love of God. Ideal parents (and all of us know some of these) persist in loving all their children, and sometimes love them equally; or even love the least deserving the best. I do not accuse God of this, believing that he loves us equally. Perhaps he does not see such a difference between the good ones and the bad ones as we do.

His love, I believe, never wavers: there is therefore no room for "special providences." A special providence, as described to me by those who sincerely believe that they have experienced it, implies that God is more careful of them at certain times than at others, or more careful of them than he is of other people. It is a mistake to attribute such a belief to conceit: it is often accompanied by a deep sense of unworthiness on the part of the believer, whose heart is flooded with gratitude at the thought that God has loved him so much when he is undeserving of love at all. I know people whose lives are irradiated by their belief in this special love and care, and who humbly seek to deserve it by the utter dedication of themselves and all they have to God.

Would they, I wonder, be less moved to worship if they knew that there was nothing "special" at all in the love of God, but that it is always perfect to all men everywhere? Would they feel less passionately grateful if they knew that he did not "specially" preserve them from that railway accident, wreck, or other disaster, but seeks to redeem all men—and nations—and worlds—from catastrophe everywhere? Would this seem to them impersonal and cold? I fear so: and yet how can I believe that infinite love is more careful of us at some times than at others, or of some of us than of others? The idea is meaningless to me. I believe that we sometimes do and sometimes do not co-operate with God, and that, when we do, we often (though not always) have a sense of being directed, protected, and inspired. I do not believe that this is due to a change on the part of God but of ourselves.

> "Who sets his feet on law's firm track
> The universe is at his back."

Sometimes we realise this, and, glorying in it, feel that God is with us. But he is always with us. To infinite love there are no "special" people, times, or needs; but always, everywhere, to all, God is the same. He is not less Love than believers in special providences think, but more: the most penetrating sense of his protecting care for them at some crisis in their lives shows, not what he was then—when they realised it so clearly—but what he is always.

This seems to me to be true universally. God, it is sometimes said, "chose" the Jewish race. I believe rather that the Jews chose God. I read somewhere that God does not choose out some nations or some

prophet and deliver a message to him on the telephone, but broadcasts his message, though only those whose instruments are rightly tuned can receive it.[1] So has it been with nations. One of them responds to one aspect of the Divine and one to another: some, it seems, hardly respond to anything. Then to those who did respond, it may truly be said that God revealed himself; but it can only safely be said, if we bear in mind always that, since he is God, he seeks to reveal himself all the time, and the difference of revelation lies not with him but in us.

Through all this his love has never wavered, altered, grown less or more, being simply perfect. All responsibility therefore lies upon us. I believe that God does for us, in waiting and in patience, in activity, in revelation, in love, everything that can be done: we respond by fits and starts. At one point the revelation seems to break out upon a whole nation. At another a great individual arises and proclaims to us a divine truth. Yet again our lethargy overwhelms us, and all seems overwhelmed once more in ruin and loss. But it is not so. Still are we the children of God and still are we forever restless until we find him. Still he calls to us, leads us, sustains us in existence, urges us forward. Whole nations of the earth—perhaps whole worlds in the universe—seem to give up the struggle. Individuals everywhere seem to do the same. But insurgent life drives us forward nevertheless, sometimes at one point, sometimes at another. Each age, each nation, each individual is great, not in proportion to the special love of God, but in proportion to his ability to respond to it.

[1] I regret that I cannot find this quotation.

I refuse to allow myself to be baffled by the question so often raised as to whether without God we ourselves can do anything, and whether even our willingness to respond or to co-operate is not his alone. Of course it is : but in some sense which still leaves the responsibility with us. God immanent—within us—does all. If he were wholly to leave us we should not exist, and all our striving towards God is but the striving of God within us. Still we have some responsibility or we are less than nothing. We can quench the Spirit or not—as we choose.

We have free will in this matter, and this freedom can be defined. It consists in this—that we can work with God or against him. We can understand and enter into his purpose or set ourselves against it. This is all. We cannot change it or break one of its laws : we can only break ourselves against them.

Exactly as it is with us and the laws of physical nature, so it is with the laws of the spirit. We cannot break or modify by a hair's-breadth the laws of Nature, but we can, by obedience to them, make its powers our own ; or dash ourselves to pieces and blow ourselves into the air with those same forces. It is as we choose, and we are free to choose.

So with the deeper purpose of God as expressed in the laws and powers of the Spirit. We can—and we do—hope to change them or determine to defy them. We cannot escape the disaster and damnation that follows such action. Here our freedom stops.

This freedom—of obeying or defying, or more commonly still of blindly ignoring—the laws of God—we exercise as free moral agents. As we strain our eyes and our understanding to catch a glimpse of his unchanging purpose and to identify ourselves

with it, so we advance in power and freedom. Averting our eyes we plunge into disaster. But God never ceases to reveal himself, and blindly, haltingly, agonisingly, we seek to find him.

We see him triumphantly revealed in Beauty and Truth and Love. God is immanent in all the universe and the heavens declare his glory. Did they less declare it when we were less able to see it? If the starry heavens moved in beauty and order, God was revealed in them; but while, like the lower animals, we looked on the ground, we read no message in the sky. It was not because the message was not there. Even a little century ago its whole glory was not seen by us—but it was revealed by him.

Wherever men have seen Beauty they have seen the revelation of God. Wherever they have looked for Truth they have found God. Wherever they have loved he has revealed himself in them. At these points the Spirit of God has entered in to take possession. But he seeks to enter everywhere and at every point. His desire neither relaxes nor renews nor intensifies. He seeks to possess all things, always pressing in upon his universe like a mighty tide. In him there is no variableness neither shadow cast by turning: variableness is in us alone.

Where we resist that incoming tide, we suffer. We cry out against God for hurting us. Where we receive it, we are filled with power and life and the world cries out that we are a chosen people. The Jews received great revelations of God from great prophets, and, though they killed the prophets, yet they accepted some part at least of their revelations: so we say of them that God "chose" them or "prepared" them. It is misleading. God chooses, and

reveals himself to, all. The responsibility of answering is ours.

The apparent injustice of a God who could deliberately choose out a tiny little race or a few individuals and divulge his secrets to them does not exist. He broadcasts : we listen-in—or do not ; we tune our wave-lengths to the right pitch—or we forbear.

The power to recognise truth is common to the human race. It grows with exercise, and some races and individuals become more progressive than others, create more beauty, advance in science, or proclaim a more spiritual religion, because they have exercised it. It is, however, latent or awake, in us all. Our terrible capacity for loving a lie, great as it is, is less than our love of truth. This will appear to some people as astonishing a statement as that human nature is more good than bad ! In fact it is the same statement. Truth and goodness are only different names for the same thing. If, however, we remember that lies are disruptive and destructive, we shall at once realise that it is only truth and goodness that hold us together at all, and any community of human beings that holds together is, however crude and savage it may be, a demonstration of the fact that in that community there is more capacity for loving goodness and recognising truth than for loving a lie and hating goodness. The holding together is the proof. Our difficulty in believing this is due to the fact that we have all arrived at such different degrees of truth-loving and, none being yet perfect, our truth is mixed up with so many different kinds of lies, that we miss each other's painfully well-disguised truths in our amazement at their lies.

There is, nevertheless, a divine instinct for truth

which is the spirit of God in us, and God has not given it to some and denied it to others.[1] Nor to any of these truth-lovers has he left himself without a witness, though we receive the witness or reject it according to our desire. For the glorious capacity for seeing truth is the reward of loving truth; therefore it grows with growing love. One of its noblest manifestations has been in scientific discovery. Students have gathered together masses of fact: genius has seen the underlying law or meaning of these facts. This is a process not entirely of the reasoning mind. Imagination or insight are there too, and without them the discovery would not have been made. "The discovery of even a small fragment of scientific truth produces on the discoverer an extraordinary sense of exaltation. Is this not to be explained by his having been the instrument of a revelation? He has not created anything, but it is in effect as if he had done so—had established a piece of irrefutable and eternal truth—had added one stroke to the grand picture of reality in this astounding universe."[2] "Scientific progress . . . waits upon the audacity of faith. Mr Edison bet his life that there was a world of undiscovered wonder and worth, and he staked all to win its secrets. His intuitions have been almost uncanny. No saint could be more audacious in believing in God than Mr Edison has been in believing in Nature. The process is the same for saint and scientist—intuition, initiative, discovery."[3]

[1] "The true Light, which lighteneth every man that cometh into the world."—John i. 9.

[2] Professor Arthur Smithells in a letter to myself.

[3] "Mysticism and the Audacity of Faith." By A. Bardwell Patten. *The Christian Century*, 26th October 1922.

Professor Soddy describes the same almost mystical intuitive process.[1] Writing of the theory of the conservation of energy, he quotes Lord Balfour's "humorous description" of its beginnings: "A company promoter who should issue a prospectus based on no better evidence for this tremendous theory than the originators advanced would certainly be in peril of the law."[2]

He goes on: "The gist is that the tendencies of scientific belief which, long before there was anything like proof, and often in the teeth of apparent contradiction, have proved fruitful, centre round the idea of conservation. The idea appeals irresistibly to the mind, and *then* the progress of knowledge confirms it. The progress of knowledge—speaking as a scientific man—might of course disprove it utterly, but the history of discovery has so far borne out the intuition, and justifies one in respecting deep-seated and universal intuitions as some guide to the inquirer after knowledge."

Great truths, therefore, whether scientific or theological, have often been widely though very dimly recognised. Everywhere men have sought God (or Truth), "if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: for in him we live and move and have our being."[3] The nearness of our minds to the truth is shown by our recognition of it; our failure to recognise each other's discoveries is due to the fact that we see different sides of each truth, and mix it with our ignorance and our lies. The strange thing

[1] In a letter to myself.

[2] Gifford Lectures, "Theism and Humanism," p. 232. Hodder & Stoughton, 1915.

[3] Acts xvii. 27, 28.

to me is that, when people do recognise a common belief, instead of rejoicing, many are inclined to discard their former belief in it! As though truth could only be true so long as it was our own special property!

It is found, for example, that the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation are taught by many religions besides Christianity; that a Virgin Birth is attributed to many besides Christ. The Resurrection of the Dead is an almost universal belief in one form or another. A Holy Communion, by which men eat and drink the flesh and blood of their god and so enter into possession of his powers, is found among the most savage peoples. These discoveries have filled Christians with dismay and unbelievers with glee. I do not understand why.

Is it a shock to know that almost all human beings have believed in some kind of a god? It is true! At least it is true that the belief in the existence of some Power beyond the things we see—the merely material world—is common to almost every race of men. I am inclined to believe that it is universal, and that the very rare exceptions among whom no religious belief at all has been discerned by explorers and inquirers have some kind of religion notwithstanding. The extreme difficulty that we have in understanding one another is increased in such cases by the further difficulty that primitive people are exceedingly shy at talking about their gods at all. In any case, if people exist who really have no conception of a spiritual power at all, they are exceedingly rare. That the belief in God everywhere exists is to me, and I think to many people, a convincing argument that he does exist, for truth lasts and lies

die. The belief in God or gods has been stubborn and universal : I do not think it could have been so had it not been based on truth.

No people has ever been left wholly without the capacity to believe in some spiritual power, and no religion is wholly untrue. Even if the power believed in is an evil power of cruelty and fear, it still contains this one element of truth—it *is* a spiritual power—a power unseen—a power behind and beyond material things. It is touching to see how men have groped after God, in whose existence they have everywhere believed, and tried to understand his purpose and fit themselves to it. All ritual and religion lies in this effort and *is* this effort.

Men with a greater passion for truth than others realise other truths about God. In a sudden burst of glory, Greeks will proclaim his Beauty or Jews his Righteousness. To one nation he is Truth and to another Law and to another Unity. All these things are true.

In the progress of humanity one nation will outstrip another, and in a nation one individual surpass the rest. That nation or individual, too far ahead, may be persecuted or destroyed : yet men are still all the children of God, and they recognise the truth at last. In the struggle upwards they seize it, and, because it is a struggle from the material to the spiritual, and the material is still too powerful with them, they seize the most spiritual truths proclaimed to them by the most far-sighted of our race and materialise them ; thus losing their unity, confusing themselves, and persecuting one another for clothing the truth in different words or mixing it with a different kind of lie.

Still humanity cannot forget the Truth, and still it appears and reappears in our religious experience, in form after form, now less now more spiritual, but never wholly lost.

So the great truths of Christianity, the Trinity, the Incarnation, the work of the Holy Spirit, Redemption, Sacramentalism, and the rest, are recognised by us in many religions, not because they are false, but because they are true, and all men dimly see and grasp them in one form or another.

Had such truths—beginning with the existence of God himself—been for the first time revealed to the Jewish race in Palestine nineteen hundred years ago by Jesus of Nazareth, we might well have believed in the favouritism of God. People might justly have inquired what sort of a God he was who reserved these astounding revelations and "staged the great drama of the Incarnation" in this little corner of the earth to one little tribe of people alone: but he and his truth press in on every side, unresting, unceasing, and here and there we see and we proclaim them, till at last the earth shall be full of the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea.

Chapter XI.

The Incarnation

Divine love, thus pressing in on us on every side, is immanent everywhere. Nowhere and in nothing has the Spirit been altogether driven out or altogether defeated.

And only once has God been perfectly received. Only once has he been able altogether to enter in and take possession. This is the Incarnation.

Why was this little earth chosen as the scene for the great drama of the Incarnation? It was not chosen: it needed God, as all the universe needs him; and God sought it as he seeks all.

The nature of God could not be perfectly revealed in lifeless or non-spiritual creatures. Neither in the stars nor in the lower animals, beautiful and revealing as they are, could he be altogether shown. Nor yet could he be revealed in human beings before human beings had reached a certain stage of evolution. Had Christ appeared among the bushmen of Australia he could have achieved nothing: but then he could not have appeared among them. It would have been impossible. Humanity at that point of development could not so have responded to God as to produce such a person as Christ.

Why were the Jews chosen? Again, they were not chosen: they had sought God with a persistence and understanding greater than that of other men.

And "if with all our hearts we truly seek him we shall ever surely find him." They found him who was seeking them and all humanity, because they sought more earnestly than the rest. They learned that he was Righteous and Lawful and One and a Father. They had no more evidence before them than others, and certain aspects of the Divine they did not see. But they saw the significance of the facts on the whole more completely than others did. Some of them saw so much that Christ himself, questioned on certain points, could do no better than quote from their great prophets. When one asked him: "Which is the first commandment of all?" Jesus answered him: "The first of all the commandments is, 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord, and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind and with all thy strength': this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, 'thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.'"[1]

Even where he had to go further than they, Christ took the moral standard of the Jewish race as his starting-point. In paragraph after paragraph of the Sermon on the Mount we read—not, as Christians often suppose, that the Jews were wrong and he was going to set them right, but that the fact that they had got so far already in the understanding of God's laws enabled him to show them more. They had realised that justice was allowable but not revenge: Christ said they must now realise that not justice but love is the will of God.[2] They had learned that it was wrong to commit adultery: he told them that it was wrong even to have an adulterous

[1] Mark xii. 28-31 and Luke x. 27. [2] Matthew v. 38-44.

thought.[1] They had learned that it was wrong to break an oath: he told them that they should be so upright that no one would trouble them for an oath.[2]

At each point Christ accepts the evolutionist's position: it is because the Jews have pressed on so far that they are now able to go farther. And the Jews, thus knowing God, gave us Jesus Christ. This was neither a piece of favouritism on the part of the Almighty nor a mere accident. It was after the nature of things and according to law. Evolution is proceeding to its goal.

This Christ, going far beyond his people—who had gone far beyond the rest of us—saw God and revealed him to us perfectly. We now know what God is like. We have reached a point at which the human race was fine enough and spiritual enough for God to be able—at last—wholly to enter in at one point and in one person. This is why, in looking at Jesus Christ, we see God.

Is Jesus God, then? Can we believe in the divinity of Christ?

Yes; for God—his love neither destroyed nor decreased by his world turning from him and casting him out—had never rested "in his home in heaven" but sought us out. This is the truth of Immanence and Incarnation, and it was inevitable that love should act so. No one who loves can keep away from those he loves when they suffer. No one who is a lover can be content to send help from a distance. Neither does he hurry to the side of the loved one from a sense of duty, or because no other help is obtainable. He is drawn there by the irresistible

[1] Matthew v. 27-28. [2] Matthew v. 33-37.

compulsion of love. Even if he can do nothing at all to help, he wants to be there—he cannot keep away. Let him, he would urge, at least share, even if he cannot avert, the suffering. If it be asked why he does not keep away, the answer is because he cannot—he loves. God who is Love itself could not see the suffering race of men and keep away from them. He came to seek them—all of them everywhere.

> "He sent no angel to our race
> Of higher or of lower place,
> But wore the robe of human frame
> Himself, and to this lost world came."

In parable after parable, of the lost sheep, the lost coin, the prodigal son, this truth is set before us. The shepherd seeks his lost sheep, not for a long time, but "*until he finds him*." He finds us—the human race—but none of us receives him wholly, except Jesus Christ.

God, therefore, was able in Christ to reveal himself perfectly, and in such a way as we, also human and also the children of God, could best understand or least misunderstand.

This seems to me most beautiful and wonderful, but not difficult to understand. I do not see how God could have acted otherwise. I have to confess that many of the difficulties about the divinity of Christ seem to me now a matter of words. I believe we have really gone past them, and they are no longer difficulties and no longer real: but, unfortunately, while we now think scientifically, we still use the language of the Middle Ages for our theology, and this language does not fit our thoughts.

I believe that, if we realised this change in our way of thinking, we should change some of our words and our phrases, and no longer have the feeling of dislocation from which we moderns are so apt to suffer when we turn from reading a book on science to a book on theology. I perfectly realise that the next stage of our evolution may bring us beyond the scientific method of thought to something deeper, higher, and more true. But I humbly submit that *now* we are going through a scientific stage of our development, and that we are right in believing that the astounding truth and beauty revealed to us by science is a real revelation of God; a revelation which, until we get further on still, governs our thoughts.

This is specially true in the case of what is called the divinity of Christ.

To the mediæval world, God and man were entirely separate beings; "divine" and "human" totally different ideas. Christ, who was both God and Man, was therefore a really incomprehensible being who, in a sense, bridged the gulf between God who was "up" in heaven and man who was "down" on the earth. It was terribly difficult to keep the mind fixed on a being who was at once God and Man, because God and Man were in mediæval thought so utterly different and apart. Consequently, endless discussions took place and countless heresies arose, some sacrificing the divinity and some the humanity of Christ. Men were really trying very hard to believe something that was so contrary to reason that they hardly could "believe" it.

To-day we do not think of God as "up" in heaven and ourselves as "down" on earth, but of

God as everywhere. We believe he is in all things, and therefore we must believe he is in us. There is no final impassable gulf between God and his creation ; neither, therefore, between God and Man. We really are his children, and therefore it is only recognising a necessary truth to say that we have something of the divine nature in us, poorly as we reveal it.

Christ revealed it perfectly. No part of his being was in darkness. All was possessed by God. In him God was perfectly manifest. His spirit was wholly one with God's. In him, therefore, God became Incarnate.

What is the difficulty ? That this makes no " final " gulf between Christ and ourselves ? But then there is no final gulf between God and ourselves.

Is Christ then no longer to be regarded as unique ? Certainly he is unique. No other has been altogether possessed by God. He is God's only-begotten son—the son in whom God is well pleased. In a large family of children it may happen that one only is like his father. One alone bears the stamp of his father's spirit in looks and thoughts and ways. It will be said of him : " that is his father's child ! " Or even : " that is the only one who is his father's child ! " All of them are the children of their father by physical generation, but this one by a deeper tie —by an identity of spirit.

So are we all the children of God of whom Christ said that he is " my Father and your Father, my God and your God." He even quoted with approval that startling saying from the Psalms : " I have said ye are gods and all of you are the children of the Most High." Christ was in no doubt of his own unique

position, but he showed us that it consisted in his perfect spiritual unity with God. When we are in such unity of spirit with any one, we say we are " at one " with them. Add one thing to another thing and you make two things ; but spirits so added to one another make " one spirit." Twins may be so much alike that they cannot be known apart, yet no one says they are " of one body." If two people are as much alike spiritually, we do say they are " of one spirit." So Christ and the Father are one ; and so our Lord tells us to think and do as he does " that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven." At the close of his life his great prayer for us was that we might all be one—" as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee, that they also may be one in us."

Expressing thus my belief in the divinity of Christ, I am confronted in the latest form of theological controversy by the word " deity." I believe in the divinity of Christ : good : but do I believe in his deity ?

The deity of Christ : what then is meant by the deity of Christ ? That Jesus of Nazareth is transcendent God, absolute, unconditioned, infinite, eternal ? People really seem to mean this, and to demand that I should mean it, and yet it is to deprive words of all meaning to say so. If Christ be God transcendent, what difference is there in our thought of God the Father and God the Son ? Is not one God transcendent and the other God incarnate ? But if the divine becomes incarnate, it ceases to be absolute and unconditioned : it is conditioned by the mere fact of incarnation ; it is conditioned by the flesh.

So Jesus Christ was conditioned. It is meaningless to speak of transcendent deity as "increasing in wisdom," or of being unable in certain conditions to do certain mighty works. Yet St Mark tells us: "He could there do no mighty works because of their unbelief." [1] Transcendent Godhead could not say: "My Father is greater than I." [2] Nor could Omniscience marvel at anything ("he marvelled at their unbelief" [3]) or be ignorant of anything ("of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no not the angels that are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father"). Such a deity would not say: "Of myself I can do nothing," [4] or "All things that my Father hath *given* me I have made known unto thee." [5] It is not on any one of these sayings that I lean but on them all together, and on our Lord's attitude of continual and complete dependence upon God the Father. This is perfectly compatible with the belief that he was divine—one in spirit with God Almighty—a revelation of him to us: but all this also is compatible with the humanity of Christ—which the other belief is not. If Jesus knew all things, and could do all things, his humanity becomes a mockery and his hopes and beliefs, surprises of joy and grief, a mere pretence.

It is in the Gospel of St John that we find the divinity of Christ most clearly stated. It is indeed his theme throughout. Christ was the expression of the mind of God—the eternal Word made flesh—the pre-existent only-begotten Son of the Father—it is with him that the Gospel is concerned. But all this is described as a profound unity of spirit, and it

[1] Mark vi. 5. [2] John xiv. 28. [3] Mark vi. 6.
[4] John v. 30. [5] John xv. 15.

is this same Gospel which most strongly insists on the divinity of the ordinary man !

In proportion as we share the spirit of Christ we, too, are the sons of God. As he is one with God in spirit, so should we—so must we—become. Again and again this glorious note rings out : " Even as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee, that they all may be one in us." [1] " I have said, ye are gods and all of you are the children of the most High." [2] " At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father and ye in me, and I in you." [3] " And to as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God . . . which were born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man but of God." [4] " That was the true light which lighteth *every man* which cometh into the world." [5]

Or, as Dr Moffatt has it, " The real light, which enlightens every man, was coming then into the world."

Mr Middleton Murry writes :—

" What was Jesus to his own inward eye ? Above all things else, the son of God, who had sought in vain for earthly brothers. By bitter experience he had proved himself God's only son. . . . Of his communion with God he could not doubt. But other men had communed with God. None knew so well as he the authentic voice of God as it came from the lips of the prophets of old. But his communion was different, strangely different : he had known God, not as a servant knows a master, but as a long lost son his hidden Father. . . . For him God had to be one in whom all his love could find satisfaction and rest. To him no other God was possible ; and to all other men such a God was impossible.

" So he had become, inevitably, God's only son. . . . Per-

[1] John xvii. 21. [2] John x. 34 and Psalm lxxxii. 6.
[3] John xiv. 20. [4] John i. 12. [5] John i. 9.

haps the splendour of that loneliness is unthinkable. Yet somehow we must imagine it, even though it be, as it can be, only for a single moment. We must know that it was not some mysterious and unimaginable delusion. He had become what he had become by an inexorable necessity. Once grasp the fact of this man's communion with God as he came up from John's baptism—and who, that has eyes to see, can deny it?—then he was inevitably bound to become verily and indeed the only son of God." [1]

I believe that Christ claimed for himself just this. He knew that no other had ever been in such communion with God as he: no other was so "one" with him. He was therefore the only-begotten Son of God. He warns us against any other interpretation. He says that if any one "shall speak a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him: but unto him that blasphemeth against the *Spirit* it shall not be forgiven." [2]

It is a text seldom preached upon. I understand it to mean the converse of what Christ meant when he said: "Not every one that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." [3] We are to believe in love and to act as though we believed in it: this is to believe in the Holy Spirit. To blaspheme against the Holy Spirit is to put evil for good and lies for truth. As long as we are in this state of mind we are, simply, in an unforgivable state. We cannot be forgiven, not because God refuses to forgive us, but because we cannot receive forgiveness.

On the other hand, to recognise truth, to give our

[1] "The Life of Jesus," chap. xviii., p. 159. By J. Middleton Murry.
[2] Luke xii. 10; see also Matthew xii. 31-32, and Mark iii. 29.
[3] Matthew vii. 21.

worship to love, this is to be forgiven and accepted, even though our doing so does not include our acceptance of Jesus Christ. We may actually reject him—we may " blaspheme against the Son of Man." Even so, we may be forgiven.

I think that Christ must have had in mind those people to whom his religion should be presented in such a guise and by such teachers as made acceptance the more impossible the nobler were those to whom it was presented. There are people to whom Christianity has been presented as a religion of fear, of injustice, of stupidity, of narrowness, of dishonesty. Look at Shelley's rendering of it in " Queen Mab " and see what a monstrous thing Christianity can be made. Those who reject Christianity and Christ when it is presented to them in this way are assuredly not far from the kingdom of God. They reject it because it is indeed a horrible thing. Not knowing what Christ really stood for, they reject him with indignation : they blaspheme against the Son of Man. They are not, therefore, without forgiveness.

In nothing has the divine love of Christ shone forth to me more radiantly than in this amazing teaching. Not every one that calls him Lord or God is a follower of Christ ; not all such will be received by him. Again and again they may find themselves rejected as " workers of iniquity." It is the Spirit that they must recognise. Those who do the will of God—whether they use the name of Christ or not—are the children of God, for they, too, have his Spirit.

Has any other founder of a religion spoken words so Godlike as these ? So selfless ? So perfect in love ?

"He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God and God in him." So writes the beloved disciple, and makes us all divine, since all of us love some one or something. But he goes on: "for God is Love," and so makes of Christ God himself, for Christ's whole message, life, and being were Love.

Here we begin to understand how it is in and by Christ that "all things were made and without him was not anything made that was made."

Love is the principle of creation. No other power exists by which it is possible to create, except love. Indifference can create nothing: hatred actually destroys.

But love creates and must create. It can no more *not* create than light can refuse to shine. It is light because it shines, and it shines because it is light. So love creates. It is really as meaningless to ask why God created the universe as it is to ask why light shines. Love must create because to create is the nature of love. To me it seems in the end as foolish to ask whether—in spite of all—the Creator of the universe is Love since no one ever did or could create anything except by love.

There is a wonderful unity of truth in the Bible. It begins with the words: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."[1] In one of the books of the Apocrypha[2] it is written: "Never wouldst thou have created anything if thou hadst hated it." Finally, almost the last word of the Bible: "God is Love."[3]

God then creates because God is Love. Christ is the Incarnation of the Spirit of love. In this sense I humbly believe that he was indeed pre-existent,

[1] Genesis i. 1. [2] Wisdom, xi. 24. [3] 1 John iv. 16.

"begotten before all worlds," and that "by him was everything made that was made."[1] Of no one else could this be said, for of no one else could it be said that he was the Incarnation of Love. Of Christ it is said and is literally true. Nothing of hate or indifference was mingled with his love. No resentment, no revenge, no selfishness, no love of power, no greed—nothing shadowed that love or diverted it from its purpose.

The heart of the religion that Christ taught and the nature of the God he revealed are the same—they are love. Other great revelations of God have been made before Christ came, and have been made since. Egypt had thought of God as Truth, Persia as Light, India as universal Spirit, Islam as Unity and Power. To the Greeks God was Beauty, to the Jews he was Righteousness and Law. Christ showed that Beauty is the expression of Love, and Righteousness and Law are Love itself.

The value of any religion to humanity is simply the value of its God. All these great revelations were and are true, and they all form part of the spiritual education of humanity. The revelation of God as Love sums up all the rest, and beyond it I cannot see how it is possible to go. If, for the sake of argument, we consider the possibility of another and a higher revelation by another and a greater Messiah, I ask how, in actual fact, there could be any revelation of God more glorious or more complete than this—that God is Love?

Christians have made the grievous mistake of setting Christ against Confucius, Zoroaster, and Buddha, and the teaching that God is Love against

[1] John i. 3.

the teaching that he is Light or Power or Law. Determined to be right, they have imagined that their rightness demanded that every one else should be wrong. They denounced the world's great educators and prophets of the past, as though God had indeed left all men without a witness until the first year of our Lord. The only exception they made was in favour of the Old Testament, for the first Christians were all Jews. Christendom, indeed, made up for this afterwards by treating the Jews with more concentrated hatred and cruelty than any other race on earth. Everywhere, however, they have consistently held that if Christ and Christianity were right all other teachers and religions were wrong.

This is to rob Christianity of its true supremacy. For Christianity is the consummation of all other revelations. Christ's method was quite other than ours. As I have shown, he addressed himself to the Jews as to people who had gone a long way and were certainly in many respects ahead of the human race in their conception of God and of goodness. He led them forward from that point. It was because they had "heard that it was said by them of old time"[1] that he was now able to speak to them of yet nobler things. And these nobler things that he told them were simply that God is Love.

Love includes righteousness, beauty, power, light, and law. Therefore it is the final revelation. To denounce other revelations as false is to exclude from our own idea of God and of Love the qualities or aspects they proclaim: it is to impoverish our worship and to narrow our God.

[1] Matthew v. 21, 27, 31, etc.

The disastrous consequences of this narrowness are seen in the fact that Christians have often been afraid of Beauty and have built hideous churches where they sing bad verses to false music. They have been afraid of Truth and struggled helplessly against the advance of science, giving the impression that to be religious is to be silly. They have ruled out Power and their religion has been reduced to a vapid sentimentality, well expressed by the drooping and effeminate Christ of modern religious art. Love itself shorn of Wisdom, Power, and Beauty has seemed merely a weakness.

Christ's God of Love was not so. In him was gathered up all the revelations of God the world had ever yet accepted. It is a final revelation because no higher can exist.

To this revelation the whole of Christ's life and being were given. He then is both unique and final. Thousands, perhaps millions, of years may be needed before we understand or practise all that this revelation means to the human race and to the universe, nor shall we reach the goal of our evolution till this is done. But the revelation has been made, and by Christ. All else—all progress—all redemption—all evolution—now turns upon this belief in love. On Christ, therefore, creation itself depends.

Unbelievers sometimes say that if we Christians would stop saying "God is Love" and begin saying "Love is God" they would be willing to join with us. Would they? Do even Christians—does any one—really believe this?

Love is God. I am ready to say it. I want—I desperately want—to believe it. I admit that Chris-

tianity will never be Christlike until we Christians do believe it. But it is a hard, even a terrible saying. What does it mean? On the lips of our critics it seems to mean that love is the thing they give their homage to, the thing they find most beautiful, most divine, most worthy to be called godlike. This is good; but to say that Love is God is to say much more than this. It is to believe that the creative power in the universe and throughout the universe and beyond the universe is love. It is to believe that love creates, sustains, and keeps us. It is to deny the power of hate. It is to refuse to rely on hate or force or cruelty. It is to believe that love—since love is God—must at last prevail.

It is to believe this when everything seems to deny it: to look at innocent suffering and wrong, the defeat of high purpose, the wreck of great ideals, the sacrifice of the good and pure—and still to say love is God. It is to believe in love as the supreme power in the universe, not only on Easter Sunday, but on Good Friday.

Christ did so because he was love and love dwelt in him. He lived out his belief and saw his life close in failure. Around him on the cross he saw the hating faces of the crowd he had lived and died to serve. So far from creating in them the response of love, it seemed that he had evoked nothing but hatred. Seeing it, he felt that even God had deserted him. Yet he believed in love when God himself had gone. Forgiveness and pity inspire his latest words. No anger or resentment was found in him. If the weapons of love broke in his hands—if God himself abandoned him—he would use no other weapon, worship no other God. Even in his dying agony he

knew there were no weapons and no Gods that were any use if these failed. He staked all on love and, seeing beyond the anguish and failure, at the last, when darkness covered him, "he knew that he had won."[1]

This is to believe that Love is God. No one has ever believed it but Christ.

Yet, in my heart, I too know that it is true. I know that Love is God and God is Love. I know that there is no other power in the universe to create or to sustain in being. I know that if I rely on any other power I must fail. I know it, because Christ has demonstrated it to me in his failure and his victory, and I acclaim him the Incarnation of that divine Power which was with the Father before the worlds were made, by whom the worlds were made, and without whom nothing has been or could be made.

I cannot read the Gospels or any part of the New Testament without realising the awful loneliness of Christ's perfect love. This is the miracle of the Incarnation to me. How could a perfect life be lived in an imperfect world—nay, an imperfect universe? Must we not be all of a piece and all infected by the general imperfection? And if we find Christ—as I do find him—thus perfect, he becomes of more than earthly meaning: he becomes of cosmic significance. Here, perhaps, in all the universe, has been found the one point of perfect communion with God. Here God has penetrated the barrier of materialism set up at the fall and comes in to take possession. The human race on this little planet may be the only race in the materialised universe—whatever may be

[1] G. A. S. Studdert-Kennedy.

true of beings on another and more spiritual plane—which has struggled upwards to the point at which it was possible for a Christ to be born, and this the one point of perfect communion of God to the universe.

If this be so, I understand a little better the meaning of St Paul's strange saying: "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first fruits of the Spirit . . . waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body."[1] In the redemption of the material world by the Spirit we have these first fruits. We ourselves are able to give the command again to the Spirit as regards one material thing at least—our own bodies. Through this, will the universe itself at last be wholly repossessed by God?

Does this terrific responsibility lie with us? No one can go forward without incurring the responsibility of leadership. If God has been able to give through the human race a Christ, humanity itself has now the leadership—is now the point at which God can take possession of the world and make, not only this world, but all the universe completely his own again.

This is the cosmic significance of Christ. In this sense he was "pre-existent" before the world first began. How shall we understand such a saying as this? Theologians and philosophers may do so, and may discuss and dispute it to eternity, but we also—we lay people—have to come to some sort of an idea about it all. My belief is that this Christ was (in untheological language) the embodiment of love

[1] Romans viii. 22, 23.

—the incarnation of God, who is Love. In all his thoughts and words and acts—in his whole life—he was inspired and guided by this Spirit. And "he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God and God in him; for God is love."

Chapter XII.

The Humanity of Christ

Some people still divide Christ into "divine" and "human" as though these were quite separate things. One they call Christ and the other Jesus. I have purposely avoided doing this, because I believe it is a return to an old and unscientific way of thinking. Jesus Christ may be, for purposes of argument, divided into God and Man, or the Son of God and the Son of Man, or Christ the Messiah and Jesus of Nazareth: but all this seems to me to have become unreal. In fact, Jesus Christ was one person, not two, and to divide him up in this way is artificial. Moreover, it separates him entirely from the human race and so destroys his meaning for us.

It is, for example, suggested that he was Jesus until he was baptised, when the Spirit of God descended upon him—or some other great spirit—and he became the Christ (without, however, ceasing to be Jesus). The Spirit, having possessed him for several years, abandoned him on the cross and returned to heaven, when the crucified cried out: "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" After this he became Jesus again and died.

To more orthodox theologians this idea will certainly seem very crude and unnatural, but I confess that to me it does not seem more so than the old

mediæval attempt to distinguish rigidly between the divinity and humanity of Christ.

I believe that the Spirit of God was in Jesus Christ from the beginning, as he is in all of us : but that, unlike us, at no time did Jesus drive out or reject the Spirit. He was, therefore, what God meant men to be—human perfection. His life was lived as God would have men live. It was therefore a revelation at once of God and of Man, and each one involved the other. I do not see how the two can be separated, and I do not see what advantage is gained by attempting to separate them. In the human life of Jesus Christ we see the mind of God.

St John writes of him : " In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." [1] We all know, however, that the word he used is not perfectly translated by " Word," and theologians and translators now substitute "Logos." This probably helps them but does not help us, except to warn us that " Word " is not an adequate translation. Accordingly, a great deal of labour has been spent in trying to explain what St John did mean by Logos, and how far he was taking over into his Jewish theology an idea belonging to Greek philosophy. This interests or should interest us all, because, if St John was doing that, he was doing just what each succeeding generation ought to have done and often has done—he was trying to state Christian belief in the language and thought of a new generation and a different civilisation.

This is exactly what we scientific Western people are trying to do now. St John was the first to

[1] John i. 1.

attempt it.[1] I believe that his thought about the Logos was prophetic for us, for it shows that Jesus Christ was perfectly divine because (and not *although*) he was perfectly human. He was God's idea of a Man. He was that idea which always existed in the mind of God, made flesh. He lived among men and they saw him to be " full of grace and truth." We now know what God wants us to be : the goal of our evolution is in sight.

I know that many people, apart for a moment from the evidence, object to the idea that Christ was a perfect man ; because they find perfection or sinlessness a colourless idea, suggesting a negative rather than a positive virtue. I realise that this danger exists, and that we have too often thought of Christ as of a person who merely abstained from obvious sins. This is stupid, and leaves a curiously empty impression on the mind. A highly respectable and perfectly virtuous friend of mine once ruefully remarked to me that, after hearing a number of sermons in which he was told not to swear, not to drink, not to gamble, not to commit fornication, he was left wondering what there was left to do ? I admit that this is the impression created on the minds of many people by the teaching given from religious pulpits, but I do not believe that the impression arises from the perfection of Christ but from the exceeding imperfection of Christ's followers, who have for the most part preferred the unheroic to the heroic virtues. From the colourless picture we have ourselves thus presented to the world, we go on to argue that Christ would be more

[1] Unless we are to accept the view that St Paul had already tried to interpret Christianity in the language of the mystery religions.

help to us if he *had* sinned, because *we* have sinned and need some one who has gone through the same experience.

But there are thousands of good men and women —saints on earth—who do us precisely this service. Beginning with St John, St Peter, St Paul, St Francis, St Catherine, St Theresa, St Joan of Arc—there are dozens in the highest rank, hundreds in the next, thousands in the next—down to our own personal friends, whose sins and failures, together with their shining virtues and heroic struggles, fill us with love and worship. These erring, valiant saints of God will often draw to themselves the love that some say should be given to God himself. I do not think God is jealous! No, nor Jesus Christ. Our eyes are too dim to see God in all his beauty. Even revealed in the form of the carpenter of Nazareth, we are often at first more dazzled than enlightened. We shut our eyes against the radiance of that light. It is in the face of our mother, our friend, our teacher, that we first see the love of God. If we need the help of one who has sinned and recovered, the world is full of such help for us.

Only one in the world's history can give us what Christ gives — only one has been perfectly and throughout true to the perfect pattern of humanity. If Christ did not do us this supreme service, no one else has. Every one else has failed at some time: every one, therefore, is less than perfectly human. And it is really only the one who has resisted temptation to the bitter end who has experienced its full force. Whoever, therefore, is tempted, has Christ with him farther along the way than any other being.

If, moreover, Christ had sinned, it seems incom-

prehensible that he should have had no sense of sinfulness. It is clear that the greater the saint the greater his sensitiveness to even the smallest fault. To commonplace sinners it is often startling to read the confessions of a saint, who accuses himself of being the worst of sinners in a way which strikes our tougher conscience as extravagant and morbid, even perhaps unconsciously hypocritical. As we develop a greater sensitiveness to sin, we become aware in ourselves of faults which once we hardly noticed, or noticed not at all; they weigh upon us now; their memory becomes grievous unto us, the burden of them is intolerable. We begin to understand why the saints find themselves so dreadful and accuse themselves of such wickedness for, as we draw near to God, the radiance of his purity shining upon us sets our secret sins in the light of his countenance. We see what, in the dim light of our life away from him, was unnoticed or even invisible. We understand why St Peter cried out to his Master: "Depart from me for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

Christ was nearer to that radiance than any other. It is incredible to me that if he had sinned he should not have been agonisingly aware of it. There is no confession of sin here, however—no self-accusation. When asked by John the Baptist why he had come to be baptised by him (since baptism is for the washing away of sins), he replied: "Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." Would not his reply have been different—would it not have been: "Suffer it to be so, for I, too, have sinned," if he had been aware of the slightest deflection from the purpose of God in himself? It is to me convincing testimony to the

moral perfection of Christ that he never thus testified against himself, for if there had been any defect in him at all, it is certain that he would have been a thousand times more conscious of it than any saint that ever lived.

I interpret in this sense a saying that has often scandalised orthodox Christians: "Why callest thou me good? There is none good save one, that is God." [1] Since men did not accept him either as divine or even as a messenger of the divine, why did they ironically call him good? Let them understand what was implied by such a form of address! It is another way of saying: "By their fruits ye shall know them," or "If I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast them out?"

This is what Christ is to me—the pattern of humanity, the one only perfect and truly human being that yet has lived on earth.

I see in the beauty of sun and stars and earth and sea the glory of the divine, and in some moods I want to see this more than anything else. But I do not see there how I am to live—I—a human being, not a star—a human being, not a wave of the sea. I do not see in the celestial courses of the stars what *I* should be, nor what is the purpose of God for me, nor how I best can lend myself to it. I do not know what I ought to be nor how I ought to live. The lilies of the field cannot show me that, and I remain untaught for all my gazing at the rainbow. Even to look at my fellow-men may only cast me down. They err—as I—and if I imitate them too closely, or even seek too earnestly, without imitation, to make their spirit mine, I shall fall into their errors and

[1] Matthew xix. 17.

distort the purpose of God as they did—even the best of them. How much I owe to all great men and women! How am I moved to love and admiration by their glorious lives! How easily may that very admiration lead me astray, if I have no perfect pattern for my guide!

Since all the evolution of my race, and all its struggle upwards from the beast, has made possible at last a perfect man—but once, yet perfect—I fix my eyes on him and see what before no man has ever seen—the purpose of God for Humanity—the Word of God made flesh.

No words could explain this to me. No rule of conduct, no code of ethics could make me understand it or enable me to *see* what I was aiming at. Life must be lived to be understood, and life escapes the codes and the rules. Christ himself—the living Christ—alone could be the Way and the Life, and I am very sure, looking at him, that " no man cometh to the Father but by " this Way : nor can the human race become what God desires except it become like this.

Men have proved their capacity for seeing truth by recognising what Christ was to their race. When Pilate led Christ out to the crowd and said, " Behold the Man," he meant only " Behold the man whom you insist on crucifying." He had offered them a choice : they might have Jesus or Barabbas. They had replied that they wished Christ to be crucified and Barabbas set free. Perhaps in a last hope of saving his life, Pilate brought him out to them as if to ask—do you really want to crucify this one ? this man whom I now set before you ?

They cried all the more " crucify him," and he

was crucified: but Pilate's words have been caught up by humanity and given a larger meaning. Men have realised, half-consciously perhaps, that they meant more than Pilate knew or the crowd understood. *Ecce homo!* Behold mankind! Behold humanity!

The phrase has echoed down the ages, and come to mean no less than that.

In Jesus Christ we recognise humanity at its best. This has been the verdict upon him of his brothers and sisters, the rest of mankind. To this day men, even while they shrug their shoulders at the impossibility of it, admit that if we were all like Christ our problems would be solved. What is this but to admit that to be like him is to be in perfect harmony with the purpose of God?

Men like Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells—the keenest intelligences of our time—find in him this surpassing greatness. It is the Christ of St Luke[1] that has "conquered the world," says Bernard Shaw; and Mr Wells, in his "Outline of History," writes of him: "We shall tell what men have believed about Jesus of Nazareth, but him we shall treat as being what he appeared to be, a man, just as a painter must needs paint him as a man. The documents that testify to his acts and teachings we shall treat as ordinary human documents. If the light of divinity shine through our recital, we will neither help nor hinder it." And it does shine, as nowhere else, even where Mr Wells writes of Buddha or Mohammed. "Jesus was too great for his disciples. . . . In the white blaze of this kingdom of his there was to be no property, no privilege, no pride and

[1] The most human of all the Christs.

precedence; no motive indeed, and no reward but love. Is it any wonder that men were dazzled and blinded and cried out against him? Even his disciples cried out when he would not spare them the light. Is it any wonder that the priests realised that between this man and themselves there was no choice but that he or priestcraft should perish? Is it any wonder that the Roman soldiers, confronted and amazed by something soaring over their comprehension and threatening all their disciplines, should take refuge in wild laughter, and crown him with thorns and robe him in purple and make a mock Cæsar of him? For to take him seriously was to enter upon a strange and alarming life, to abandon habits, to control instincts and impulses, to essay an incredible happiness. . . . Is it any wonder that to this day this Galilæan is too much for our small hearts?" [1]

Being thus perfectly human, the experience of Christ is of universal validity. From H. G. Wells to Mahatma Gandhi is a far cry. Yet Gandhi says that Christ has done more for India to-day than any other. From the carpenter of Nazareth to a king is far enough also, for class divides hardly less than race. Yet kings and queens have been among the saints of the Christian faith.

Nor is the life of Christ made invalid for any of us by sex. I never knew a woman who felt that Christ was less to her because he was a man: to us all he is simply human, and we are human—like him in that, at least.

Born nineteen hundred years ago, in an Eastern country, of a civilisation very unlike ours, he stands

[1] "The Outline of History," pp. 271, 274, 275. H. G. Wells.

at the heart of human experience, and we do not feel that his ethics would be different or his genius baffled by the problems of conduct and complexity that confront us to-day. When we get deep enough, human experience is all alike : and he is deep enough.

Scientists tell us that in our bodies we bear the traces of our humble ancestry, and that in our mothers' wombs our embryonic life recapitulates, not in detail of course, but in a kind of summary or shorthand, the stages of development through which humanity itself has passed in evolution from the humblest forms of life to man. I believe that in Christ is summed up our future as well as our past. In his mother's womb the embryo passed through all its stages to birth : from birth grew up into perfect humanity. This is a prophecy of the end that we see. Ecce Homo !

Christ encouraged us in the belief I have here set down. It is true that he claimed a unique position : he was the first—the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He showed us how to live until at last we too should grow " to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." He emphasised our common nature with himself, teaching us to call God " Father," as he did. To us gave he power to become the sons of God. Himself he calls the Son of Man.[1] To us he promised powers over the world equal to his own. He is the representative of our race.

I find the perfection of Christ as a man in his

[1] The Son of Man is a title whose meaning has been the subject of much learned discussion. Probably we shall never know exactly what those who used it meant by it. It bears, however, one sense at least which cannot be denied to any ear sensitive to shades of meaning—that Christ was " Very Man of very Man," the type and representative of Mankind.

reaction to every difficulty and every situation. It is not a negative but a positive thing. It is not that he avoided sin but that he met life triumphantly. The difficult, ambiguous, perplexing relations and events that leave us troubled, ineffective, or defeated, never left him so. Of all things he was master and in all circumstances perfect.

This I know is not every one's judgment. People who love and venerate Christ will stop short of calling him perfect, not only because they find a certain imperfection more human and lovable than perfection, but because, looking at the records of his life, they feel that here and there he failed. He was, they think, harsh, arrogant, or unjust at such and such a point, and, even against their will, honesty compels them to criticise and to condemn.

Let me say at once that I believe such honesty of judgment to be far more after the mind of Christ himself than the sentimental or merely cowardly assumption that we must silence our own judgment and believe in a perfection which we should not admit if we were not coerced into it by being told that Christ was God and all criticism a form of blasphemy.

As a matter of fact, I think there are very few people who, if they felt perfectly free to judge, would not admit that some of the things our Lord said and did jarred on their taste or outraged their sense of right. I believe we ought to feel free to judge, for I believe that the least we can bring to our Lord is honesty, and, unless we are honest on this point, we shall never understand him at all. I am, then, frankly glad that there was a time when Christ was not more to me than one among the world's great Teachers,

and as such open to my criticism. I am glad, because I feel that it would be impossible to worship him as I do if I had to admit that there were things in him that I dared not examine too closely for fear I could not venerate.

Is this not true of many of us? If we had Jesus with us now, in the flesh, denouncing the Pharisees and refusing to denounce the adulteress, would our moral judgment go with him as whole-heartedly as we think it does, he having lived and died so conveniently long ago?

I do not know what are the things that shock and wound the conscience of my readers most, but I can guess at some of them. There are people who to-day make of our Christian Sunday what the Pharisees made of the Jewish Sabbath—a day of rigid observances and harsh rules, which often violate rather than fulfil the purpose of that day of rest. There are people who make of the Bible as a whole—and their interpretation of it—what the Pharisees made of the Old Testament and their commentaries on it. If Christ were here to-day, declaring that Sunday was made for man and not man for Sunday, would he not shock such people? If he were roundly to affirm that what they "had heard of old time" was now to be superseded, would they not be as much more scandalised than they are when I say it in proportion as he would say it with the greater power? But more than this. If Christ were to denounce those people now as he did then, would not the very denouncing shock all the rest of us? Why, it would be asked, even by those who agreed with his view of Sabbath or of Scripture, must he speak so harshly to people whose intentions are excellent and whose

religion though narrow is, nevertheless, sincere? I have heard this argument so often—used it myself so glibly! Can I honestly say that I am not a little scandalised at the almost savage denunciation of my Lord? Ought not one so good and gentle to have given the Pharisees credit at least for sincerity? Should he have called them hypocrites without even explaining what he meant by using such a word? Are not tolerance and courtesy specially Christian virtues?

To others it seems that Christ was not severe enough! It is most clear from their own attitude to sins of the flesh how his must shock them, if they would allow themselves to be shocked. *They* do not say to the rigid Sabbatarian or the Verbal Inspirationist "the publicans and harlots go into heaven before you," and they do not think it. Their judgments are not Christ's.

Many a good Christian woman has confided to me her secret annoyance at the rebuke bestowed on Martha. Men also have expressed a mild surprise. Nothing, indeed, will deprive the housewifely Martha of her pride of place in the judgment whether of men or of women, nor will they in their hearts admit for a moment that Mary chose the better part. Christ's verdict does not shake their conviction that women, one and all, should choose with Martha. And after all, they will say complainingly, Martha was doing her womanly best to make her Master comfortable; he might have been a little more sympathetic with her anxieties! If they do not say it, they will in every act of their lives make it clear that they think it.

Again, most difficult of all to me at least, there is

that incident of the Syrophœnician woman. Look at it how you will, it remains a fact that a woman came to our Lord in a woman's deepest grief—pleading for the very reason of her child—and he replied with an insult. It is useless to gloss over the words—to be called a dog is, in the East, an insult, equivalent to our calling any one a swine. The dog is to them the very symbol of uncleanness. Can that word of Christ's be forgiven or explained away? "Lord, help me," cried this mother, and he answered: "It is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it unto the dogs."[1]

There are as many grounds for seeing imperfections in Jesus Christ as there are human beings to question and to judge him. I know that this sounds most arrogant — even unpardonably so: but I know—at least I believe I do—that it is worse than useless to be dishonest with him, or to allow our moral judgment to be bludgeoned into silence by the weapon of his divinity. Christ means too much to the human race to be upheld as perfect if he was not so.

If I believe him to be the perfect Pattern of my kind, it is because I have tried to be honest and am now convinced. It would not be in place here to enter into a long discussion of each and all of these supposed "imperfections" that I have noted: if I were to attempt it I should still not meet the point of some one else, whose judgment boggled at some quite other act or word than mine. It is the fact that, after some experience, I have made such a remarkable collection of criticisms with regard to our Lord's conduct and teaching that makes me realise how

[1] Mark vii. 27.

genuinely troubled people are sometimes about things that seem to me very grave, and sometimes about things that seem to me very trifling. There are people who believe that, by assuming that all is well, they can be sure that all will be well, and who therefore complain of Christ's warning to St Peter that he was going to fail: our Lord, they think, would have been better advised if he had been quite sure that Peter would not fail. The cleansing of the Temple has scandalised many pacifists. An earnest temperance worker and devoted Christian confessed to me in a moment of candour, that she "did wish our Lord had not turned that water into wine." Christ's message to Herod—"Go tell that fox"—shocks the polite, while the miraculous draught of fishes appals the vegetarian. The parables of our Lord have been criticised in the same spirit. No one with a really high standard, I have been assured, could have commended the conduct of the wise Virgins who, although they were wiser were certainly more unattractive than the foolish ones, and a more beautiful parable, it was urged, would have condemned the wise Virgins for not sharing their oil even at the risk of going short themselves. I have heard it said that the treatment of the elder brother in the parable of the prodigal son was indefensible; and that the unjust steward should be commended scandalises many people of good-will beyond endurance. The difficulty goes deeper than any of these perhaps rather trifling criticisms. There comes a point at which most people ask themselves whether the other-worldliness of Christ, though beautiful, was altogether wise: whether the teaching about non-resistance, for instance, would not make a man

who practised it both despised and despicable. Such criticisms must be met, if not in the pulpit or on the platform yet in the secrecy of our own conscience. To try to meet them without shirking has been to me a spiritual experience. Admitting quite frankly my own misdeeds and trying honestly to understand how one so much better than I should have fallen short (as it seemed to me) of my poorer standard, I have come to an understanding of Christ's moral sublimity which, small though it is, I believe I could have reached in no other way.

I feel his anger against the Pharisees to be the measure of his love, and in his gentleness to the sinners of the flesh I see the falseness of my own morality. I see in his rebuke to Martha a promise of power, and an assurance that a woman's spiritual life is no less important to God than that of any man. The key to his treatment of the Syrophœnician woman I find to lie in the fact that her daughter *was healed*, and that all that led up to this was necessary in order that that might happen. Others may interpret these things differently, and on the last point, certainly, explanations are many and diverse. The one thing that remains with me is a growing conviction that, where I have even very humbly disagreed with or condemned my Lord, I have not so much been wrong where he was right as I have been wrong on a wholly different plane from his rightness. My standard, my motive, my understanding have been altogether different and, compared with his, altogether at fault. He outsoared my judgment for he moved in another world and on another plane.

I seem to see myself gravely arguing that it is very wrong to commit adultery. That is true, is it not?

I am right on that head at least? And my Lord says to a woman taken in adultery—in the very act—"neither do I condemn thee." I am right from where I stand: that is the pathetic—or the comic—part of it. He was right in a way which has forced this episode into the Gospels, coming from no one knows where, written by no one knows whom, but bearing on its face the evidence of its divine truth. No one could have said that but Jesus of Nazareth. Neither poet nor prophet could have invented it.

I believe that there is a lack of spiritual soundness in all our criticisms of Christ. As in the presence of all greatness, so supremely with him, our judgment judges not himself but us. We attempt to find out why he said some of the things that sound harsh or startling, or even unreal in this difficult and prosaic world. The effort to discover why he said them, without assuming beforehand that he must have been right—the frank acknowledgment of the possibility of his being wrong, without which one cannot really judge or criticise at all—the effort to reach his mind and understand why he acted as he did, or why he gave such apparently impossible advice to people in general, has convinced me that there is always some lack of spiritual soundness in oneself that makes the criticism possible. Some lack of imagination, some failure in the sense of poetry, some stupidity which fails to perceive the point of wit or the edge of irony, and—more often, alas!—a fear that, if we accepted all that our Lord said and tried to be all that he was, we should find we were committed farther than we meant to go; selfishness, timidity, short-sightedness, stupidity—these have

in my experience always been at the bottom of every doubt that I have felt of Christ's moral perfection.

Christ moved upon another plane than mine: he lived not now and then for an instant of time, but all the time in God's presence, and to God he continually referred himself. He "did nothing of himself" but what the Father told him. All things that the Father gave him he gave to us. "My Father worketh," he said, "and I work." "Believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me; or else believe me for the very work's sake."

For the work's sake: after all, it is for the work's sake that we do believe him. It always is. If it had been enough to write a book, another could have written it—to give us sound advice and high ideals, another could have told us of them. In the last resort we need not a book but a life; not advice how to work, but the work itself. Here it is that Christ reveals to us human nature in all its power and beauty.

For the more serious criticisms among those I have quoted, and the many more that I have not, are based on the belief that his teaching is unreal—inhuman—remote from actual life. It is not beautiful but childish to lay down high-sounding maxims of conduct which in this actual world would not work. Christ was—I maintain it—a pragmatist. He said that by their fruits we shall judge men, and by its fruits, therefore, we are to judge his own teaching. If it fails, thus tested, it is shown to be unsound.

So, again and again, we feel that it has failed and it must. We have tried (for example) giving to all who asked, and it has not always or generally been

successful. From the point of view of Christ himself it has not been so: it has demoralised the receiver. Indiscriminate giving has been found to demoralise whole classes of people and whole districts. In extreme cases men have even mutilated themselves in order to beg more successfully and escape the necessity of work: and the more profuse the generosity they have thus evoked, the more demoralised they are, and the more they lead others into the same bog. I think there can hardly be any one who has not been in this difficulty in a more or less extreme form if he has ever tried to give at all.

I have heard it said, too, that not to resist evil would have even more deplorable consequences. If a man is really to accept injury, indignity, and insult, without an attempt to defend himself, he will be not only despised but he will be despicable. Such an attitude is not manly and neither commands nor deserves respect. Still more do we feel that a man should resist evil when the evil is being done to some other—perhaps quite innocent and helpless—person. It seems impossible to believe that Christ meant to teach anything so base as acquiescence in cruelty to others.

It does: but why? Because we are confronted in every objection we make by the figure of Christ himself. Christ, we say indignantly, *could* not have taught anything that was cowardly, selfish, or mean. Against his word we instinctively set Christ himself. We realise that he—his acts, his life, himself—illuminate and interpret his ethic.

Let us look at it again, then. "Give, and it shall be given unto you"—"give to every one that asketh." It would be disastrous to do so. We our-

selves have found this. Always? No, indeed! Often we have given and found the giving twice blessed to giver and receiver, for we gave to one we loved, and gave what we valued little in comparison with that love. At such times, when people we love are in some need that we can supply, we often feel that the only value our possessions have is that they enable us to meet that need—that they are ours only, and we care to have them ours only to lay at the feet of our friends. To give becomes a sharing; the idea that we demoralise one another by it is ludicrous. What a little thing it is that we give! And yet the giving is a sacrament—an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.

If we were able to look at men and things as Christ did, loving *all* men and prizing material possessions only as a means of expressing that love, we, too, could give without demoralising. It is the impersonal, unloving gift that poisons and is poisoned.

I do not urge that we should act in a way which we know from experience will do more harm than good. I urge that our inability to do it and to do it rightly is not due to the wrongness of giving, but to our unlikeness to Christ. He could give. It is vain to argue that what he did was mistaken, for we have only to look at him to see that it was right. The wrong is in us. The measure of our unlikeness to him is the measure of our failure as human beings.

The same holds good of the teaching of non-resistance. Hardly can I describe that abject man who meets insult and wrong without attempting to defend himself, without my thoughts turning to Christ at the judgment seat of Pilate. Here was one

who when he was reviled reviled not again ; when accused made no answer ; when struck, insulted, spat upon, made no effort at self-defence. Instinctively, too, I compare him with another who acted as, we say, we would have a man act. When Peter in the Garden of Gethsemane saw his beloved Master attacked by overwhelming force, what could he do against a battalion of Roman soldiers ? Nothing, truly : and yet something he must. He drew his pitiful little sword—among their whole band there were but two !—and hit out in his Master's defence. We are so familiar with the story and the rebuke that followed that we almost forget that St Peter was doing what we should all wish to have done in his place — defending, even when defence was hopeless, the Master to whom he owed allegiance. If afterwards he failed—if like the rest he forsook and fled—can we not understand and sympathise with that too ? Might he not urge that it was senseless to stand by one who would not stand by himself ?

We must needs love St Peter for what he did—for that forlorn and desperate act of loyalty : but our worship is not for St Peter : it is for Christ. What human heroism—what manliness—what courage can stand comparison with that scene of deathless majesty when the Son of Man stood before men to be judged ? Not he, but they were judged—not he, but Pilate, Judas, Peter, and all—for Christ is the touchstone of all our virtue, the pattern of all our humanity.

> "Still as of old
> Man by himself is priced.
> For thirty pieces Judas sold
> Himself—not Christ."

To what end do we reiterate our protest that to meet false accusation with silence, and insult with submission, is cowardly and base? The words are silenced on our lips in the presence of Christ. A thousand—a hundred thousand—men and women can rise to that noble pagan standard. We have another now: it is Christ. His non-resistance—hateful word—like his giving, was an act of love. It was not mere submission, mere negation. So long as he could, he appealed to men to understand and to love him. He loved them to the end.

This is clearest if we look first at his personal friendships, for it is in these specially human relationships that we, human as we are, most easily understand him. And Christ had personal friends. If his great heart could love the world and did, he needed also, as we need, the intimacy of personal friendship. He called twelve round him, and I think he called them as we call our friends; because he needed them and felt they needed him. This double need is the very soul of friendship, but it happens, of course, that we need one more than another, and they need us in different degrees. Jesus leaned specially on three friends; and even of these three loved one the best. Of the twelve, one needed him most of all, and knew it least.

Why did Christ keep Judas Iscariot among the circle of his friends? Something at first attracted him, no doubt; but with his piercing insight into the hearts of men he must soon have realised there the possibility of failure—even perhaps of treachery. Why did he keep him till the end?

Because to the end he hoped to win him; to the

end he hoped that he would understand and respond. I do not think that Jesus knew beforehand where and with whom he would succeed or fail with anything that we should call supernatural, that is, magical knowledge. He was wiser than others and saw farther, but there was nothing magical in his insight. He hoped to win Judas; and he failed. I do not think that he had a thought for his own personal danger: he thought not of himself but of Judas, and this is why, in the very moment of betrayal, he could call Judas his friend—he who never used a word insincerely. To him, Judas was a friend because he loved and hoped to save him.

There is courage, if we talk of courage! The bravest of men may be excused for shunning a traitor. What man embarked upon a dangerous adventure would not in common prudence shun such a one?

Who could be blamed for cowardice if he refused, in such circumstances, to keep a traitor at his side, sharing his inmost counsels and his thought? Let such a brave man judge if Christ's bravery reached—or outsoared—the measure of his own! He, without a thought for himself, kept Judas by his side to the end, for to the end he would not give up the hope of his redemption.

When Judas saw what he had done he went out and hanged himself. Of course he did. What else could he do? How could the world contain both himself and the friend he had betrayed? He went out of the world—into hell. He thought he would escape Jesus there. He forgot, as many preachers of damnation and hell-fire do, that though we go down into hell God is there also. According to our

Christian creed Jesus was crucified, dead, and buried. He descended into hell. To find Judas.

All his friends forsook him and fled—Peter with the rest. Peter had been loud in his assurances that he could never be so base. "Though all shall be offended, yet will not I," he cried. Christ knew better. He knew that even Peter, brave as he was, could not be trusted to stand by the Master who would seem as if he had abandoned his own cause. He knew that that would be too hard a test even for those who loved him best. He knew, too, *how* hard it was, and judged Peter more mercifully than we do. So he said to him that, though he would fail, he was not to give himself up as hopeless: he, Christ, trusted him, Peter, all the same, and knew that he had strength enough to help and to lead the rest. "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren."

We all know how Peter failed; how he denied his Lord with oaths. Then, as he cursed and swore, Jesus turned and looked at him. I think that look reminded Peter not so much that he had failed, as that Christ had known beforehand that he would fail and had trusted him all the same. I think it reminded him that he, the coward, was to "strengthen his brethren." I think that look, which drove him out to weep bitterly, saved him from going out to hang himself like Judas.

This was not "non-resistance" to the evil in Peter: it was a conquering and unconquerable love. And such love Christ had for the world. While he could he tried to win them: when words and even acts of service could win them no more, he offered himself to the worst that they could do, to prove to

them how poor and weak a thing was hate. Could he have proved this otherwise? Could anything convince us that the noblest humanity of all, and the bravest and the best, is not the soldier, but the Christ?

I have known it happen so often! The graces that in our hearts we half despise—the graces of patience, of courtesy, of forbearance, we cannot learn to admire from any argument or precept. Secretly we ask ourselves whether they are not a sign of weakness, whether they are altogether compatible with manhood. It is only when we see them in Christ that we see their glory. The greatest soldier in the world is but the greatest soldier: it is of the Christ, insulted, bound, suffering, condemned, and helpless, that we say "Ecce Homo!" "Behold a Man!"

Seeing Christ's greatness I am now ready to believe him right. I cannot yet love enough to give as he did; my gifts are still gifts of which both giver and receiver may be afraid. I do not yet love enough to conquer: my non-resistance may be mere cowardice. Never again, however, dare I say that it is not possible to give all to all and by one's gift ennoble giving. Never again may I admit that to be patient with the treacherous, silent before the accuser, speechless under infamy and insult, is unmanly. I have seen it: if it is not human it must be because it is divine.

I began by thinking of Christ as a great but an imperfect person; I have come to the conclusion that my judgment has been at fault. There are many hard sayings still for me, and many things that I do not at all understand, but I now believe that it is my

fault—my ignorance and stupidity—that I do not. I do not think I could ever have gone even as far as I have, if I had begun by assuming the moral perfection of my Lord : and I think I am justified in believing it now. This is the course of many a human friendship. We begin as strangers and become acquaintances. Acquaintance deepens into closer intimacy, and we arrive at a knowledge of our friend which enables us, quite rationally, to say we *know* that there are certain faults of which he is incapable. I do not hesitate to say that *no* evidence could convince me that some of the people I love could be guilty (for example) of a base and treacherous lie or of an act of cruelty against a child. There are sins they often commit, but—I would say—not these. Of these So-and-so is incapable. If I saw him do it with my own eyes I should think my eyes had deceived me, or that he had suddenly gone mad and was " beside himself "—not therefore himself at all. Such certainty must be the fruit of long friendship ; it could not glibly be declared of any chance acquaintance or a passing friendship. Yet there is a stage of knowledge at which it becomes possible and reasonable to be sure of some virtues in a friend.

Such certainty have I of Christ, not of one virtue but of all. Since I have always found him right, and right in a way and on a plane that confounded me and my little judgments, I do now trust him altogether, and cannot find it unjustifiable or unreasonable so to trust him. I find him perfectly human, and therefore I find him divine.

Perfectly human—that is my point. Perfectly and gloriously, Christ was a man. I dare not sacrifice

anything that is told of him, any record of his manner of life, without the most careful scrutiny, just because I see in him the perfect Pattern of us all. I must indeed defer to the judgment of the scholar on points of doubt, depending on a text or the interpretation of a text, but whole aspects of his life and work cannot be ignored without misgiving. If he, Christ, was the goal towards which our own evolution tends, the pattern laid up in heaven of humanity as it is in the thought of God, everything that he did and said and was is of tremendous significance to us.

This is why I urge that Christians should not so lightly put aside the records of the nature miracles of Christ. Of these the evangelist must have been thinking when he recorded the startling prophecy about our own power to do and outdo the mighty works of our Lord. The promise, startling as it is, is even more significant than appears upon the surface. It involves not only our own evolution: it involves our idea of the nature of evolution itself—and that involves our conception of the God who is behind it.

When I am baffled by the catastrophes of nature, and ask myself how the ways of God can be justified to men in the earthquake, the storm, or the volcano, I consider this strange and startling promise. It is found, remember, in that gospel which gives the greatest prominence of all to the divinity of Christ. "The works that I do shall ye do also, and greater works than these shall ye do." What can this mean? It is, I am certain, only in a universe deflected from God that pain and suffering are possible. Can we then hope—since nature is so "fallen"—to set the

world in order here ? Why, we are doing it already ! The genius of man is not willing to admit itself *permanently* helpless at any point. But if the pains and catastrophes of nature have their origin in some deep spiritual cause—some spiritual disorder of fear or lies—then the Spirit must at last reclaim and redeem it.

Christ's nature miracles, like the moral miracles we first desire to work, and like the healing miracles we are now trying to understand and work also, are a prophecy of what mankind is capable of and of what it shall one day achieve. To reject them is to reject something of infinite significance to the human race. It is to fail to recognise the source of all disorder which is not in the spirit nor in matter, but in the failure of the spirit to dominate material things.

I take courage to say that I no longer stand quite confounded before the catastrophes of nature. I see that these, too, are consequences of a spiritual wrong —of a wrong relation between spirit and matter. Christ calmed the storm, and in his doing so I, the child of a scientific age, in which the triumphs of mind over matter have been " miraculous," see the operation of a spirit more powerful and more far-sighted than the greatest intellectual genius that we have yet produced. And, no less than when he stood before the mocking crowd over whom he was to exercise a power that they could neither believe in nor understand, I cry " Ecce Homo ! " " Behold a Man ! "

The Incarnation is therefore the turning point in human history. At last it has become possible for Christ to be born. At last humanity has struggled upwards so far as to enable God to enter in and

possess one life completely A nation has cared for him sufficiently to be the nation of Christ : a Christ has come. Long hungering and thirsting after righteousness has done this. It was not the slowness of God to give us our perfect Pattern that made the Incarnation tarry long : it was the slowness of humanity to understand his purpose. God is not arbitrary here any more than elsewhere. Such phrases as "in his own good time" should be abolished from our religious vocabulary. God's "own good time" for redeeming suffering humanity is not carefully selected by him out of the centuries : his own good time to be merciful is now and always. It is we who tarry long.

From henceforward evolution should hasten. It is easier to go forward now that we see where we are going. "After Jesus had lived and died in it the world was never the same again. A new and unknown spiritual energy entered into the process of human life. It is not exhausted ; so far as one can see, it never will be exhausted ; and we, for our part, believe it is only now entering on a phase of plenary power." [1]

[1] "The Life of Jesus." J. Middleton Murry.

Chapter XIII.

Two Great Miracles

In considering the possibility of miracles, two are generally classed together—the Virgin Birth of our Lord, and the Resurrection of his body from the tomb. To many people it will, I fear, seem merely perverse to believe in one and not in the other. Either, they argue, you believe in miracles or you do not: here are two miracles—why accept one and boggle at the other?

Because, if miracles are the operations of forces whose laws we do not understand, belief in any "mighty work" called "miraculous" becomes a question of evidence. If miracles are to be described as breaches of natural law, evidence becomes worthless, for there are no such breaches: but, if the question is merely one of *unknown* forces, the question of evidence is all important.

It is, of course, true that historical evidence can never be conclusive in the sense that scientific evidence is so. We cannot prove historically that a thing happened once, by making it happen again before our eyes. We cannot make experiments to prove our point, nor can we use our observation to show that what we think happened once is happening now. No historical event can ever be verified as a scientific theory can be verified. Yet history is written, and one history is more reliable, more

authenticated than another. Though it is not scientific, historical evidence exists and must be taken into account. It is true that when one reads in the newspapers different accounts of the same event, or listens even in a law-court to the sworn evidence of those who actually saw it happen, despair seizes us at the idea of convincing ourselves or any one else of the truth of a historical description written nineteen hundred years ago, by persons who are unknown to us, and who wrote many years after the event described took place.[1] It is true that the sifting of such evidence presents great difficulties and, in an orgy of scepticism, people have even been found to declare, for example, that Jesus of Nazareth never existed at all. In the same vein it has been urged that Napoleon and his twelve marshals were a myth of the sun and the twelve months! It is not necessary to take such theories very seriously,[2] but it is necessary to understand the difference between scientific and historical evidence, and to realise that all history—not only New Testament history—is and must be based on evidence which to a scientist would seem almost ludicrously inadequate. It is indeed a choice between history written in this way and no history at all.

The evidence of any extraordinary occurrence such as is called a "miracle" must, therefore, be considered on its merits in each case, and our belief in it decided by the evidence. We shall, in so uncertain a matter as historical evidence, certainly disagree even more widely than scientists do about

[1] See below, Chapter on the Bible.

[2] If, however, people persist in doing so, they should read "The Historical Christ," by F. C. Conybeare. The Rationalist Press Association.

scientific evidence, and we should be, it seems to me, much less willing to dogmatise than they, instead of — as so often happens — much more willing. We should not, further, believe what we like to believe but what, after intellectual toil and travail, we find to be true.

It is, therefore, to the evidence for the Virgin Birth that I address myself. The fact that it is described as a miracle does not trouble me, since I do not believe that we have sufficient knowledge to dogmatise as to what can happen and what cannot. Neither is it conclusive that the Virgin Birth is described as a unique event. The birth of Christ was in any case a unique event; the Incarnation was a unique event. Such an event as the Virgin Birth might, even though it remains unique, be the "natural" way of our Lord's coming into the world, since his coming was unique. A certain set of circumstances might lead in the world of nature to some event perfectly in accordance with natural law, although it might never happen again. Let us therefore concentrate on the evidence.

It will be said no doubt that, whatever may be true of other events, evidence for the Virgin Birth is of its nature impossible. This can be pressed too far. Belief in such an astounding event must, for those to whom it is a possibility, rest upon the character of the persons who proclaimed it, on the possibility of their knowing what they were talking about, upon their motives for proclaiming it, the importance they attached to it, and so on. For instance, if we knew more than, in fact, we do know about the character of St Joseph or even of our Lady, and if they had proclaimed this belief as vital to the

Christian religion, and persisted in doing so in spite of derision or of slanderous misunderstanding, or if our Lord himself had done this, that would undoubtedly constitute evidence. Let us, then, consider the matter from this point of view.

The account of the Virgin Birth is found in only two of the Gospels, those of St Matthew and St Luke, and nowhere else, either in the Gospels or any other part of the New Testament. But it is also in these two Gospels that the genealogical tree of our Lord's descent from David is given, and, in both cases, that tree (though it is not the same in other respects) shows the descent not of our Lord's mother but of Joseph, his alleged father. If our Lord was not the son of Joseph, why did the two evangelists give a genealogy which is the genealogy of Joseph? I am told that this is because it was not possible under either Roman or Jewish law to assign any child except to his father's family, and that the evangelists, knowing that our Lord had no human father, were therefore compelled by the exigencies of the case (which, naturally, did not conceive of the possibility of a child without a father) to put him into the genealogical tree of Joseph. This answer seems to me very inconclusive. The Gospels were not written for lawyers, for scholars, or for historians. They were simply a help to the preaching of Christianity, and were designed to set forth who and what Christ was to a generation which had not known him in the flesh. The Gospels of St Matthew and St Luke are among the earliest of these documents—not so early as St Paul's epistles nor quite so early as the Gospel according to St Mark; but still among the earlier documents recording the great

truths of Christianity for the world. If the Virgin Birth really took place, it was an event so extraordinary that the contention of some modern theologians that it really does not matter very much whether it happened or not, seems to me quite untenable. On the other hand, if it was of great importance—if, as others contend, the doctrine of the Incarnation itself rests upon the doctrine of the Virgin Birth—to what purpose did the two evangelists give us a genealogical tree connecting the descent of our Lord with his father and not with his mother? If they had been trying to secure for Jesus of Nazareth some possession that had to be proved in a court of law—some right that depended upon his birth—it would have been very natural to do this: but if they were trying to convert the world to the worship of God incarnate in Christ, and the Virgin Birth is a part of that gospel—so integral that unless we accept it we cannot really be believers in the divinity of Christ at all—then to give the genealogy of Joseph was not only irrelevant, it was positively misleading. The insertion of the words "as was supposed"[1] does not really help us, for it does not account for the insertion of this genealogical tree at all if Joseph's fatherhood was only a popular error.

The Gospels of St Mark and St John do not record or refer to the Virgin Birth. St Mark's is the earliest of all the Gospels, and is very generally believed, both by ancient tradition and by the most recent scholarship, to have been inspired by St Peter himself, St Mark being his disciple. Surely St Peter, who

[1] "Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli," etc., Luke iii. 23.

was one of the innermost circle of Christ's friends, must have known of the Virgin Birth and surely he would have spoken of it?

St John's is the latest of the four Gospels. If the doctrine of the Virgin Birth was known only to our Lord's mother, and not revealed by her until the last possible moment, still it seems incredible that the author of a book whose probable date is about A.D. 90 had never heard of it. I know that the argument from silence is always dangerous: the author of the Fourth Gospel must have known many things which he did not put into his book: he did not, for example, record the institution of the Holy Communion at the last supper. But in weighing such a matter as this, we necessarily take into consideration the purpose of his writing at all. The author of the Fourth Gospel was not writing a history: about that we are all agreed. His book was rather of the nature of a treatise on the theology or philosophy of the Christian religion; and its main thesis was the divinity of Christ. Now, though I do not believe in the Virgin Birth, I can easily see that to those who do, it seems a most convincing—even a conclusive—proof of the divinity of Christ. I am even told that I *cannot* believe in the one without believing in the other, and solemnly warned that unless I accept the Virgin Birth as a historical fact my belief in the Incarnation must, whether I realise it or not, ultimately disappear. How then can I account for the silence of the Fourth Gospel on this point? May I not, at least, be humbly content to base my belief in the divinity of Christ on the same grounds that the greatest of all the Gospels bases it—his profound unity of spirit with God? "In the beginning was the

Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . and the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." Is this not orthodox enough? Has any better book than the gospel called St John been written on the Incarnation which I have missed reading? Or am I right in believing that this book remains for all time the greatest pronouncement ever written on the divinity of Christ? Yet that divinity is never based by the writer on any such fact as the Virgin Birth.

What other evidence is there on one side or the other? There are the Epistles of St Paul. These are the earliest writings of all. They are the work of a man to whom, humanly speaking, we owe the gospel as a universal religion and not the religion of a race or a sect of the Jews. He was the world's first and greatest missionary. His success resulted in the founding of many churches, and to these churches, for their instruction, the epistles were written. Nowhere does the author mention or refer to the Virgin Birth of Christ. This silence is perhaps not so remarkable as the silence of the Fourth Gospel, for it may be urged that St Paul was not specially concerned with the question of the Incarnation. Still, there is a great deal of "Christology" in the letters of St Paul. Theologians have shown us how his doctrine of the nature of Christ developed in sublimity. Nowhere is any reference whatever made to the doctrine on which, to-day, we are asked to believe that all orthodox Christology depends.

If it does so depend, can we accept the astonishing explanation of St Paul's silence which makes it due to the reticence of our Lord's mother? Such a matter, it is said, out of sheer delicacy could not be

made known before the last possible moment. We are asked to believe that our Lady actually kept it a secret—while Christianity was everywhere being preached without it, by St Paul and other missionaries—until, just before her death, she communicated it to the evangelist St Luke. There are limits to the follies into which feminine modesty may carry the silliest of women—let alone the greatest and best who ever breathed, the mother of our Lord. If she thought this amazing event so unimportant that she never mentioned it to any person until she was about to die—so unimportant that she allowed the world to be evangelised without any reference to it whatever for the first forty or fifty years of the Church's life—we must either assume that the matter really *was* unimportant, or that our Lady was not the wise, noble, and courageous woman we have always believed her to be. In her, we must suppose, self-regarding delicacy was carried to such an extreme as to leave in the deepest doubt and confusion a doctrine which we are told to-day is of supreme importance! This I cannot believe.

I believe that the birth of Christ was a birth of perfect purity. As I believe that humanity itself has struggled up to the point at which one small and struggling race of men, more forward than the rest, could realise, for itself at least, the Fatherhood of God; and that that race, by holding fast to their belief through many mistakes and falls, was able to give us Christ; so I believe that the earthly parents of this Christ had fitted themselves to beget and bear such a son. Humanity has not realised what it owed to the Jews: the Jews did not recognise their Messiah when he came: Mary herself (of Joseph we

know practically nothing) did not perfectly understand her son.[1] These are passing defeats in a great evolution upwards to the light, at which each stage, up to the last, must be dependent upon and yet misunderstood by those of the stage before. But since Joseph and Mary were the parents of Jesus Christ, we can well believe that they had fitted themselves—though unaware of the greatness of their vocation—to bear such a son, in perfect love.

We can believe in the divinity of Christ, without believing in the Virgin Birth, on grounds which seemed sufficient to the author of the Fourth Gospel: but can we believe in the humanity of Christ if we deny his human parentage? It sometimes seems to me that we cannot and that, in our desire to do him honour, we have destroyed belief in the Incarnation altogether, from another and unexpected side. We have failed to make real to ourselves and to others the fact that the Word was *made flesh* or that this Christ was indeed a man—the Man.

Our Lady, I think, knew and was perhaps the first to know that human love is not sinful, even where it is the creative love of sex. How strange and mournful that I must write that "even"! God made man "in his own image." It is childish materialism to think that "in his own image" means that God is like a gigantic man! It is not after this manner that we are "made in his image," but in the spirit. The creative Spirit of God is in us and we, too, create life out of love. That is why the idea of sex is associated with the words—"So God created man in his own image." "In the image of God

[1] Mark iii. 21 and 31-35.

created he him "—so the text runs, and goes on—"male and female created he them." Where there is love there is creation. Sex-love creates on both planes, physical and spiritual—a child with a body and a soul. This is most godlike; but we have not understood it and have even thought that sex is evil and sex-love mere lust.[1]

Here and there purer spirits than the rest have seen the truth and proclaimed it, but they, too, have hardly been understood, and we go on repeating "Behold I was shapen in wickedness and in sin hath my mother conceived me," as though the sex-act itself was evil and all men born as a consequence of it, corrupted by it. Mary (I think) did not share this idea. She knew that love is purity, and the love that unites two human beings in the procreation of another is like the love of God himself. Her child was born of such a love, sacramentally expressed, and was therefore born in perfect purity. Could she make such a truth comprehensible to her contemporaries? Could even St Luke understand it? I have often wished to write another chapter to that remarkable book, "By an Unknown Disciple," in which I should try to describe what happened when our Blessed Lady gave to the evangelist the knowledge which he has embodied in the first chapters of his Gospel.[2] Could any one then, but she herself, understand how unutterably, radiantly pure is the birth of the child of perfect love? Could she be altogether surprised if, in the end, he did not understand, but put into material form her spiritual truth,

[1] As it is, when divorced from the spirit.

[2] It seems clear from internal evidence that the source of this information must have been our Lady.

and turned into virginity what she understood as purity? Is it not our almost incurable tendency to turn the spiritual into the material—our "original sin"?

If every child were to be born of a great love—a love whose unity of spirit expressed itself in the sacrament of physical union—it is certain that the race itself would rise to great heights, and very quickly. One has only to realise all that such love means to the child and the child's home and surroundings to realise that. The evil consequences of much "love making" and many births and inheritances from far-back forefathers could not wear out or be lost at once. For many generations, no doubt, they would continue, and strange and seemingly anomalous births would take place. But the race itself would evolve with startling rapidity towards that Christlike perfection prophesied by St Paul, if we really procreated children only when parents wholly and perfectly loved each other.

I believe that the very common belief that exceptionally great human beings came into the world by a virgin birth is based on this truth. Many great teachers of humanity were supposed to be virgin-born,[1] and the heroes of the Greeks were commonly regarded as demi-gods whose mothers were human and whose father Zeus. These are instances of that perception of truth which is widespread among men, but generally mixed with some form of error of a materialistic kind. Virginity has been mistaken for chastity—the physical for the spiritual condition: but the truth itself appears and reappears,

[1] For example, Gautama Buddha, Zoroaster, Lâo-tsze, Mahávira, Pythagoras, Plato.

in grosser or in loftier form, and is never wholly forgotten even when, as in the case of the Greek heroes, least nobly conceived.

The birth of the sons of God should be the creation of pure love. It should be true of their parents that "the Holy Spirit shall come upon them and the power of the Most High overshadow them; hence what is born will be called holy, Son of God."[1] Was not Christ our pattern in this also?

The doctrine of the divinity of Christ has been by modern theologians connected with the Virgin Birth, though the greatest book ever written on the subject—the Fourth Gospel—makes no such connection. The story of the resurrection of our Lord on Easter Sunday has not been given the same controversial prominence, but most people accept or deny both. If, however, our belief in such "mighty works" is based on evidence, they ought to be examined separately.

Personally, I find the evidence for the physical resurrection very strong. There is no evidence against it (as the genealogies of Joseph are evidence against the doctrine of the Virgin Birth): there is only a preconceived idea that we know exactly what is and what is not in accordance with universal law. This idea seems to me ludicrous. If it is dismissed, there remain a number of divergent and even sometimes conflicting accounts of the Resurrection, which come from people who were, no doubt, in an excited state of mind, but whom it is difficult to accuse of sheer lying. The stories do not agree in detail, and yet most of them by themselves seem to bear the stamp of truth. It is difficult to

[1] Luke i. 35 (Moffatt's edition).

believe that the account in St Mark's Gospel is merely made up. Those in Matthew and Luke bear signs of a certain amount of literary embellishment, but the account of the two disciples who met our Lord on the road to Emmaus is convincing; as also the meeting of Jesus and Mary Magdalene, recorded in St John. The discrepancies in the stories when all put together seem to me just such as always arise when excited people describe an event of great importance to them. Indeed, without being excited and without the matter being important, witnesses generally produce just such contradictory accounts of things actually seen by them, as every one knows who has tried to find out the truth about anything that ever happened. It is only a thought-out made-up account of something that did *not* happen that is at all free from discrepancies, and I cannot help suspecting that if the disciples really decided to invent the story of a physical resurrection, they, simple as they were, would have done it a good deal better than they have. If people are telling lies, they make some effort to avoid glaring contradictions, though they will almost certainly be caught on some unforeseen inaccuracy. Here however, is nothing like a carefully constructed narrative that breaks down at last on some point of evidence: here, on the contrary, are a number of confused accounts which no one has troubled to make into a harmony at all.

Yet all the witnesses agree on two points: our Lord was risen and the sepulchre empty; but his risen body was different from the body he wore before his death. There, again, I find the very hesitations and difficulties of these witnesses convincing. There is no pretence that they recognised their Lord

at once and could not possibly have been mistaken.[1] On the contrary, none of them recognised Christ at first sight. Mary "supposed him to be the gardener." The two at Emmaus talked long with him before they knew to whom they talked. The disciples who found him standing on the shores of the Sea of Tiberias "knew not that it was Jesus."

They recognised the Lord, not from his physical appearance, but from some word or act of power and grace so like him that they recognised the speaker. About his body was something that was strange to them.

It is recorded also that he came and went, appeared and disappeared, as he had not done before his death. He had become "a spiritual body." That which St Paul described in inspired and glorious but profoundly mysterious language had happened to him. "It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. . . . For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, death is swallowed up in victory. . . . Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." [2]

It is true that this change, which none of us really understands, can be explained by declaring that Christ had left his body behind in the tomb and that his spirit only walked abroad. Most of us hope that

[1] How often have I heard people, anxious to convince one on a point of identity, swear with vehemence that they knew and recognised some one beyond possibility of mistake "the moment they laid eyes on him!"

[2] 1 Corinthians xv. 44, 53-57.

this will happen to us when our bodies die. Perhaps it is what happened to Christ. Many devout Christians believe it, and no one surely ought to dogmatise about it, having so little knowledge as we have. For my part, however, I believe the witness of those who declared that the tomb was empty. I believe that our Lord's spiritual power over the material of his body—always so great—had become perfect. He transmuted the very flesh and blood into a spiritual body. In the risen Christ the power of spirit over matter reached perfection. Death had no more dominion over it. "Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the first fruits; afterwards they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father. . . . The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." [1]

1 Corinthians xv. 20-26.

Chapter XIV.

The God of Nature and the God of Christ

The God proclaimed to us by Christ is pre-eminently a God of love: the God of science as certainly a God of law. Law seems to me so essential to our freedom and development that I see in the lawfulness of God the proof of his love. I cannot wish him to make an exception for any one or suspend the laws of the universe to save a saint from falling over a precipice. If God were liable to such caprice our liberty would be destroyed, and with it our capacity for moral evolution.

When I see the solidarity of human nature involve the innocent with the guilty in such a mass catastrophe as war, or individually through evil inheritance from infected parents, I see what that human solidarity involves. God could prevent us from hurting each other only by isolating us from each other. He could, in other words, prevent our human cruelties by depriving us of our humanity! For man is a social animal [1] and is not man at all if he is altogether alone. He must at least be born of human parents—there he touches the race: he must depend altogether on human service for the first years of his life, and just as truly, though less obviously, so long as his life lasts.

[1] I think, in view of our customary use of the word "political," that "social" more nearly reproduces Aristotle's meaning.

No one seriously complains of this dependence or thinks it an injury that he is loved and served. His protest is only heard when he is hurt, or hurts, or sees another hurt. It seems horrible—it is horrible—that a child should inherit disease from its parents, or be morally depraved by its surroundings before it is old enough to defend itself. Few seem able to grasp the fact that we humans can no more have the power to love and serve without the power to hate and hurt, than we can have one side of a sheet of paper without the other.

It may almost be said that it is the helplessness of human children and their dependence on their parents which have brought love into the world. Beginning with the love of mothers for their babies, the human home and family have grown up, and from them the arts and crafts have been born. The necessity for a lasting connection between parents, and of a stable home, brings the barren existence of the nomad to another stage of development. Humanity is born. If our common life is so *solidaire* that we depend for our very existence on one another, it is clear that we can, by withholding service, kill or gravely damage each other too. Parents may hand on a good or a bad inheritance "unto the third and fourth generation," neglect their children when born, or even deliberately contaminate them. Love would cease to exist if this freedom ceased, for a compelled service is not love. We shall not—I devoutly hope—always have the will to neglect or hurt, but we must always have the power to do so, or love is no longer a free or a possible thing. We shall become morally unable to hate but, logically, must still be free to do so.

At present we not only can hate but we do. Hence the damage and destruction that we do to one another. It is indeed enough to make us justify God in sending a deluge to destroy the whole race, as men have believed that he did! It is difficult to look at the cruelties we practise on each other and not cry out that God had better have blotted us out altogether and long ago. Surely, however, it is also clear that it is the haste of a little love that would act so: not the patience of divine or eternal love. It is like the teacher who, exasperated beyond bearing by the child's blundering attempts at his task, will snatch it from his hands and do it for him; but it is not the best teacher who does that.

If we look far enough, not at the short records of history which show little or no progress, but at the half million years now suggested as a minimum by the scientist, we shall see that we are learning—we are evolving upwards—we are growing more spiritually aware, more intelligent, more human. The process is sometimes joyful, often agonising, but it is progress, and it is due to the patience of God and our slow learning how to become what he means us to be.

I connect our human solidarity with the earth we live on and the universe of which we are a part. Here, too, we cannot be isolated but are a part of Nature. We bring about terrible catastrophes of war, famine, and disease, and are only gradually realising that we have a responsibility for them. We are hurt by other disasters of earthquake and storm, and do not see that these two may have[1] a spiritual cause and be amenable to spiritual and intellectual

[1] Must have.

control. The fact that we do not realise it is the first factor that we must remove from the problem. We cannot prevent such disasters as the disafforestation of Palestine or the floods of North America until we cease to be grossly stupid and ignorant about our connection with them. The connection, however, exists, independent of our willingness to recognise it. Once more I am brought back from the contemplation whether of human catastrophes or "natural" ones—from the handing on of venereal disease by vicious parents to innocent children or the destruction of whole cities by earthquakes—to the prophetic saying: "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together . . . waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God."

Even the law of prey, which seems so interwoven with all existence, is to me a consequence of our fall into matter. I notice with interest that the horror of it is found expressed in very ancient writings. In our Bible it is said that at the beginning neither men nor beasts were given each other to eat, but "every herb yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree." Sentient beings, at least, did not prey on one another, and the idea that they will some day cease to do so is associated with the same perfect existence. "The lion shall eat straw like the ox . . . they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the Lord." This seems to me to express the truth. I do not see how we can avoid doing these things *now*, for if we all became vegetarians we should still be preying on living things, and we should only create a greater competition between ourselves and those animals who also prey on vegetables. We could not eat bread without

killing some of the creatures who live in harvest-fields and barns, nor any kind of vegetable at all, I suppose, if, living in a locust-ridden country, we should refuse to kill locusts. But we can see that this is an imperfect world, and work towards that perfect command of spirit over matter which will eliminate these laws of prey, without falling into the error of attributing them to God! "The tender-hearted and the imaginative could blame humanity for the imbecile and the slum child," writes Canon Raven[1]; "they can only blame God for the liver-fluke and the praying mantis and the tiger." Why? Shall we continue to fall into the arrogant error of supposing that we and we *alone* are responsible for a fallen universe? It seems to me ego-centric to madness to think so. I would as soon blame God for my own wickednesses as for the mantis and the liver-fluke: I would as soon blame Shakespeare for the senseless lines that careless reporting, editing, and printing have left in the play of "Hamlet" as God for the blots which deface his universe.

We do not recognise our own solidarity with all things, nor think of ourselves as involved in a universal fall. Yet if the body falls ill,[2] no part of it is unaffected. Do individual cells of the body complain of having to suffer for each other's injuries, I wonder? Or protest against the necessity of rushing to the point of danger which, after all, is in some remote part of the body for which they should not be held responsible? An eye, one would think, must

[1] "The Creator Spirit," p. 10.

[2] I believe the word "fall," otherwise misleading, can be safely retained if we use it as in the phrase "to fall ill."

justifiably complain if it lose its sight sympathetically because the other eye is gone!

The body politic of a human society obeys the same laws and has a like solidarity. The diseases we breed in slums and brothels do not stay in brothel and slum, but circulate throughout the body, to our horror and amazement.

The world is no less *solidaire*. A man may suffer from rabies in this country because the people of Japan refuse to exercise proper precautions about mad dogs, and lepers exist in England who have brought their infection from the East. We, for our part, have made a present of syphilitic infection to the natives of Africa. An assassin's blow in Serajevo involves not Serbia only, but practically the whole world in the catastrophe of war.

The universe is *solidaire*, but we refuse to grasp the fact. The fact persists whether we grasp it or not, but would not persist for ever to our hurt if we did grasp it. The fact persists: the hurt only as long as we persist in the ignorance and folly of supposing that we are not *solidaire*. The fact itself I do not offer as an "explanation" of the origin of evil. It does, however, throw some light on our Lord's teaching about suffering.

It is often asked whether the God of the universe can be one with the God proclaimed by Christ, and very generally believed that there is in fact no resemblance between them. Is the God of the New Testament, of the Sermon on the Mount and the sacrifice of Good Friday, the God revealed by the scientist in the universe? Is the God of Love the god of Nature?

It depends on our idea of love. So long as we

persist in associating it with caprice, or any kind of weakness (for caprice is always a sign of weakness) our answer must be " no," for there is no weakness or caprice in the laws of Nature, and these reveal to us Nature's God. If, however, we believe that love is bound to show itself as trustworthy and strong, our answer will be different.

Unfortunately, we commonly think of love as a weak and sentimental thing. To be " good " is often supposed to be equivalent to being rather silly, and people are commended to us as very religious who are as nearly as possible imbecile. We are therefore not surprised to find that a God of love can be persuaded to change his mind, and even ought sometimes to do so, on realising that his laws do not work. To be told that he will not change his mind, and is not so foolish as to need to do so, comes as a shock to the sentimentalist and conflicts with his idea of love. This is why a great part of Christ's teaching about God has been ignored or passed over in a rather uneasy silence.

Christ proclaimed a God of law as certainly as Nature does, and nowhere gives us any loophole for believing that we can escape the consequences of law. He taught us to see God in Nature, and reproached us for the strange blindness which had prevented us from seeing him in this sublime aspect. He forbade us to put our faith in chance or caprice, and he plainly warned us that if we broke the law through ignorance of it we should suffer exactly as though we broke it through deliberate wickedness. In effect, he said that wickedness and folly were the same.

Consider how often, in proclaiming the love of

God, Christ called Nature to witness to it. "Behold the fowls of the air," he cried; "consider the lilies of the field."

"The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting desired him that he would shew them a sign from *heaven*. He answered and said unto them: When it is evening, ye say, it will be fair weather: for the *sky* is red. And in the morning; it will be foul weather to-day: for the sky is red and lowring. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?"[1] Dr Moffatt translates: "You know how to decipher the look of earth and sky; how is it you cannot decipher the meaning of this era?" They ask for a sign from *heaven*: Christ gave them a sign from the sky.

In parable after parable he called attention to the witness of Nature to God, in field and harvest, mustard-seed and vine, lilies and ravens and sparrows. If his God is not to be found in Nature, Christ must have misread it grievously, for he continually points us to that source to find him.

These are not sentimentalities. "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing, and not one of them shall fall to the ground without your Father." Sparrows do fall to the ground: such still is life: but not without their Father. The townsman Paul sees with a sense of horror worthy of the nineteenth century "the whole creation groaning and travailing in pain together": Christ, saner and country bred, saw the tears of things, the fall of sparrows, but saw also that not tears but life and health, and not death and disease but beauty and joy were the hall-mark

[1] Matthew xvi. 1-3 and Luke xii. 54-57.

of the world. Yet he speaks with infinite tenderness of these sparrows and their fall, and knows that the God of all the heavens is with them. It remains for Paul, agonising over the travail of the universe, to observe with contempt: "Does God take care for oxen?"[1]

Christ's God cares for oxen no less than sparrows. To him there is neither small nor great. The hidden down feathers of the eagle's breast are as perfectly finished as the peacock's outspread tail.[2] Consider the lilies—weeds, almost, in Palestine—how they grow: God so clothed them in beauty though they live only for an hour. This is love.

Yet love expresses itself through law. If you build your house on a bad foundation, it will fall. The man who disregards this truth from ignorance will suffer for it exactly as though he had acted with evil intention. His building will fall whether he be good or bad, whether it be a church, a home, or a cinema, whether in its fall it crushes good or wicked persons. It falls because the builder ignored the laws of building. He is not necessarily a wicked man, but certainly he is a fool.

It is shocking to many to learn that folly is so sternly dealt with. It seems that the five foolish virgins went to hell merely because they were fools. The sentimentalist raises hands of horror. What is to become of such admired advice as "Be good, sweet maid, and let who will be clever"? These maids—probably sweet and certainly more attractive to most of us than the wise virgins who told them to "go and buy for themselves"—are, in spite of Charles

[1] 1 Corinthians ix. 9.
[2] "The System of Animate Nature." J. Arthur Thomson.

Kingsley, cast out because they were content to be good without being clever. This parable is seldom preached upon.

As for the parable of the clever though unscrupulous steward, most moralists frankly give it up. Here was a man who had cheated his employer, and, when found out, deliberately added to his cheating in order to make friends for himself of his lord's debtors. "And the lord commended the unjust steward because he had done wisely."[1]

In dealing with Nature nothing is more certain than that brains are of very great importance. Our Lord, far from being horrified at this discovery, advised his disciples to combine the wisdom of serpents with the innocence of doves. No advice could possibly be wiser or nobler: none has been more consistently disregarded by the religious. Having ignored the teaching of Christ on this head, Christians frequently assure me that they have lost their faith in the love of God because, having acted with folly (though with excellent intentions) they have found the consequences disastrous.

Did not our Lord—and dare we think with some irony in his voice—warn us of this very danger? There was a man who apparently had not learned that Nature is an inexorable demander of hard work. So far as Nature has the word, it is broadly true that if we will not work neither can we eat. It is by the sweat of our brows that we win our living from her.

To those who work ungrudgingly she is bountiful. The man with one talent can win ten with it, properly used. Another will make five. But the one who does nothing at all, not only gets nothing, but loses what

[1] Luke xvi. 8.

he had. How unjust! is our sentimental cry. Christ takes the word from our lips. So be it, he says: "Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee. . . . Thou knewest that I was an austere man. . . . Wherefore then gavest thou not my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required my own with usury? And he said unto them that stood by, Take from him the pound, and give it to him that hath ten pounds: for I say unto you, that unto every one that hath shall be given: and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him." [1]

It is this acceptance of facts that impresses the mind most deeply. God (Nature) does demand hard thinking and hard work. If this is not given, good intentions, lofty imaginings, or sheer harmlessness are no substitute. The condemned owner of the talent had not done any harm with it: he had done nothing. For this he is condemned to the loss of his talent. Those who do nothing with their talents lose them. Can this fact be questioned? Do we not all know it to be true? The man who uses his talent develops and increases it. There is a law of diminishing returns and a law of increasing returns in Nature. To him that hath is given. The man who with one talent had gained ten received the eleventh—not the man who had gained five. We all know that this is what actually happens. Since we know it, why not act upon our knowledge? This is the teaching of Christ. Why waste our time in sentimental protests and silly fears when that happens which we well knew always does and always will happen? If we knew it, why did we not act upon it? "I knew thee

[1] Luke xix. 22, 23, and 26.

that thou art an hard man . . . and I was afraid and went and hid thy talent in the earth." "Thou knewest that I am an hard man," was the reply; "thou oughtest *therefore* to have put my money to the exchangers that at my coming I might receive my own with usury."

If a man has discovered a fact, he has discovered something of great value: let him act accordingly. Is this not the whole lesson of science? A fact indicates a law. This law you cannot change. Do not waste your time attempting it; do not waste your time bewailing it. Act in obedience to it and you will find that the universe responds.

Our Lord's teaching is illuminated—for me at least—by this discovery. I realise that he is not primarily trying to convince us that the universe is moral or is just: he is urging us to look at it as it is. To the man who argues that it (or its Ruler) is hard or austere, he replies that, if we find it so, we must act upon our knowledge and we shall do well. The man who refuses to observe or, having observed, to take his own observations into account, is a fool. The man who builds on sand is not condemned as a wicked man with whom God is angry, but as a foolish man who brings his disaster upon himself. The woman who fancies that her lamp will burn without oil or with insufficient oil should have known better. Lamps will not burn without oil: houses will not stand without foundations. Folly is as disastrous as sin.

The relentless God of Nature is not a whit more relentless than the God of Christ, if relentless is the right word to use. He has, I would rather say, the same unchanging lawfulness. We can rely on him

because he does not change. We can build safely because we can distinguish sand from rock.

The deeper truths or laws of the spirit are of the same constancy. Why seek to evade them? Their universal and unchanging character makes it possible for us to understand them and to trust them. In every corner of the universe this trustworthiness is revealed. The earthquake and the volcanic eruption, the flash of lightning and April shower, are as obedient to law as the rising and falling of the tides or the motion of the stars.

Why not, as the scientist does, cease questioning the justice of these things and realise that they are so? "The world is what it is, for all our dust and din."

If we accept the universe as it is, we shall find that the truth has made us free: and then, perhaps, shall begin to see that the truth was love all the time.

This is, however, the last thing that most of us are willing to do. We cannot and will not believe either that God's laws are really wiser than ours, or that we cannot convince him of this and get him to change them. Instead of trying to understand the principles laid down by Christ, we argue that they would not work. Their working is undisturbed and unaffected by our argument. Perhaps we shall realise this some day. In the meantime we present, I suppose, a spectacle as absurd as, even in our eyes, is that of a savage who seeks to bring rain by throwing water in the air or to ensure a good harvest by magic.

Love, according to Christ, is the creative power in the universe: is God. We set to work to make a world out of race hatred or national hatred or class hatred. The result is what we see.

He taught that evil could only be overcome by good: we, with a smile at his impracticable folly, expend our blood and our treasure in a "war to end war." From the fact that the war has not ended war, most of us deduce nothing. Like the university professor of ancient fame, we look this difficulty in the face—and pass on.

Christ taught that none could suffer without all suffering. We are guilty of oppression and wrong, tolerate slums, and exact from our enemies the last farthing to be squeezed out of them: and exhibit a sentimental horror at the disease, poverty, and unemployment that follow. Some even lose their faith in God because the consequence of their follies follows in due course, and cry out with passionate indignation that the innocent are being made to suffer with the guilty.

Did we not know that they always do? Or could we not know it if we would—and act upon our knowledge?

Christ proclaimed to us the law, and warned us that it was not like the laws of men, to be evaded or defied, but like the laws of Nature which no one can evade. We can discern the face of the sky, but we cannot discern the signs of the times. There is no suggestion in all the teaching of Christ of an arbitrary God laying down laws—"thou shalt" and "thou shalt not": but of a God the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, "in whose will is our peace."

So, if we accept the principles laid down by Jesus, not as arbitrary judgments about whose rightness we can dispute, but as statements of fact whose truth we cannot deny; set to work to verify them, and set the course of our life in accordance with

them, we shall find ourselves lords of infinite power. The scientist's humble approach to knowledge, governed by only one desire—the desire to find out what is and what is not so—has been rewarded by a mastery over those things into which he inquired that seems to us miraculous. So would it be if our approach to the ethic of Christ were in the same spirit. We should ask, not what is helpful to us to believe, what corresponds with our ideas of right and wrong, but *what are the facts? What is the truth?* [1]

Seeking the truth only, we should set right our wrongs, set free the world from misery, find ourselves building on the eternal rock. "Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man which built his house upon a rock: and the rain descended and the floods came and the winds blew and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock."

This revelation of a God of law is to Christ a revelation of a God of love. By his constancy God sets us free and gives us a mastery over our lives and over circumstances which we could never have if he sought continually to set right our mistakes and save us from the consequence of our own folly. Christ shirks nothing. He is no sentimentalist. He recognises the unchanging character of universal law. He sees the innocent involved with the guilty and ignorance punished equally with sin. And seeing all this with relentless clearness of vision, striving to remedy our griefs at the cost of his own life, tortured as our duller hearts can never be with

[1] "What is truth?" said jesting Pilate, *and would not stay for an answer.* Bacon's Essay on Truth.

the spectacle of our folly and our pain, he declares that the God so revealed is Love.

We have only to accept his will and to co-operate with it to find that it is indeed our peace, and that there is no other peace. Well might our Saviour cry : " Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you ; not as the world gives give I unto you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." This peace is not found but in the constancy of eternal wisdom and eternal love : it lies in perfect obedience to a perfect law.

If we are not at peace it is we who must change ; not God. The prodigal son was not forbidden to take his money and go. He was not prevented from wasting it in riotous living. The suffering consequent on his chosen course of action was not averted. He was an-hungered and would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat. But " when he came to himself " and returned to his Father, he *saved himself* from those consequences. God is no more vindictive than capricious and, if a man seeks him, he will most certainly find him. If he turns from rebellion to love, God meets him more than half-way.

Many besides the elder brother of the parable have been scandalised at this treatment of the prodigal son. Might he not have been " taught a lesson " and made to suffer a little—as he himself proposed, saying, " I am not worthy to be called thy son, make me as one of thy hired servants " ? This would have accorded far better with our moral judgment, would it not ?

It is not so with Nature. She harbours no grudges. The evil is no sooner done than she seeks to remedy

it. Opposing forces rush to the point of danger in the body to defend it from poisons deliberately, or ignorantly, or heroically incurred. The guns have not ceased firing over the field of battle before the grass begins to grow over the graves alike of patriot and criminal. God makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good. This is true, is it not? The sun may seem to us unjust, but it cannot be said that its course has been misdescribed? The God Christ bids us worship is the God of Nature.

I believe that, so far from our being invited by Christ to ignore the apparent injustices of the natural world, or to imagine for ourselves a God of a more merciful order than the God revealed to us in its order, he called that very order to witness to the nature of God and found its witness glorious and its consequences peace.

Chapter XV.

Christ our Justification

One of the greatest difficulties in the minds of Christians to-day is created by the doctrine of the Atonement. Great and illuminating books have been written about it but, for those who have no time to be learned, it remains obscure and even horrifying. I wish that it might be purged once and for all of those elements which make it horrible, for I believe the doctrine in itself to be one of the loftiest and most moving of all Christian truths.

To many people the Atonement still means simply this : that God is angry with the whole human race ; that his anger demands a victim, a sacrifice, a " propitiation " ; and that he could only be satisfied when Jesus Christ offered himself as that victim and, by an agonising death, atoned for all the sins that he had never committed.

This frightful doctrine is still preached, and even preachers who are willing to soften it down a little cling to the idea that the wrath of God (or " divine justice ") demanded some victim, and that we are only forgiven because Christ offered himself as that victim. We are " saved by the blood of the Lamb." The idea of substitution (*i.e.*, of the punishment of an innocent person for the guilty) is not abandoned.

It is, nevertheless, an idea so abhorrent to our sense of justice that it must be abandoned.

Let us say boldly that God is not angry with us, nor has he ever demanded satisfaction for our sins. The idea of an angry God is childishly human : the idea of a vindictive one is horrible. God is the Father of Lights, in whom is no variableness neither shadow cast by turning. It is we who have been angry with God and it is we who needed a mediator.

There is no mediator, no advocate, no victim in the story of the Prodigal Son. This story contains the heart of the Christian faith. It has been said of it that if all the rest of the Bible was lost and this alone remained, we should still have in it the heart of the Christian faith. This is a picturesque way of putting it, but in a sense it is true, at least in so far as any teaching without the life behind it could convey the heart of Christ to us. Yet this sublime and perfect parable contains no Christ at all ! There is the Father ; there are his erring sons, the prig and the prodigal ; there is the wandering away from the Father, the fall and the recovery, the return, the welcome home, the full and free forgiveness. No sacrificial blood is shed, no altar and no victim are required. Yet the son who was lost is found and he who was dead is alive again.

In all the sermons preached on the Prodigal Son I have never once heard one which emphasised this point ; and yet how moving it is—how adorable the God it proclaims—how easy, how inevitable to worship him !

God is not angry with us ; we have been and still often are angry with him. " God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself " [1]—not himself to the world.

[1] 2 Corinthians v. 19.

We have wandered away from God and now no longer clearly see either him or his purpose for us. We suffer because we are away from him who is the source of life and beauty; and our suffering bewilders us further. Stupidity is the inevitable consequence of sin, for sin darkens the understanding. The very thing that makes us suffer—our alienation from God—makes us resent our suffering, for we cannot understand what makes us suffer. We arraign God. How can he, we ask, endure to see us suffer? Does he not realise that the innocent are suffering too? Is he unable to save us or does he not care to do so? Is he loveless or merely weak? Does he suppose that by making us suffer he will make us love him?

These and a thousand other taunts, reproaches, or entreaties are hurled at God and have been hurled throughout the ages. From the savage who offers his human sacrifice to appease his terrible deity to the infuriated rebel of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries — a Shelley or a Swinburne — and the Christian church-goer who under his breath confesses to me that he "hates God," there has been incessant witness to the fact that it is not God who must be persuaded to forgive us; it is humanity which can neither understand nor forgive God.

If we have ever understood him, even a little, it has been through the love revealed to us by human beings. The fundamental need of the whole human race has been the love of parents for their offspring. Without this, humanity must have perished, or rather would never have succeeded in becoming human at all. The evolution and survival of our race is knit up with the long infancy of human children

and the need of self-sacrifice on the part of human parents.

To this basic fact Christ appealed. "When ye pray, say Father," he said, and said it to Jews whose finest quality is their devotion to their children. "Will any man of you being a father," he says, "when his son asks for an egg give him a serpent?" From this try to understand God! Attribute to him no more such infamies as undying resentment or savage punishment. He is our Father. Our brothers may desire to see us suitably punished for our sins[1]—may grudge us our forgiveness. Our Father does not do so. He is more glad when we repent and return than determined to exact the penalty our human justice would demand.

A child who has never known love finds it difficult to believe in the love of God. Many men and women have told me they first realised what love meant because of some sublime act of self-sacrifice or of forgiveness on the part of a father or a mother. They saw love there, and God is love, so they saw God. Many have said to some injured friend: "if you can forgive me, I will believe that God can."

But still this was not enough. We needed a love more perfect still. Christ came, and so loved the world as to convince the world. In him we have seen a love which would never coerce, either by violence or by signs and wonders; which would never defend itself or use any weapon except love; whose forgiveness of injuries demanded no reparation; who pleaded for those who tortured and killed him. Shall we think that this is the love of God? Or are we to suppose that in this the creature

[1] As the elder son in the parable of the Prodigal Son did.

surpassed the Creator, the fountain rose higher than its source?

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend." In spite of all that we can say—and truly say—about the merit of living for one's friends being more needed and more serviceable than dying for them, it remains true that greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friend. It is not a thing one can argue about: it is a deep imperious conviction that one must feel. Death is final. In death we give all: there is an end. Living, we keep the power to change our mind, to waver, to take back the gift; dying gives everything at once. Greater love hath no man than this.

So, by his willingness to die, Jesus has conquered. Could he have conquered in any other way or won us at any smaller cost? I do not think so. The gracious, reverend, and beautiful old age of Gautama Buddha has not moved the world as has the agonising and shameful execution of Jesus Christ. Literally, we love him because he died for us.

Christians have divided the life of Christ from his death in a way which robs death itself of meaning. The mere fact of death—even death by crucifixion—is nothing. All men die and many thieves have been crucified. The whole meaning of Christ's death for us was his life; and to emphasise his death as a thing apart, by which alone we are saved, is to make nonsense of the Gospel. But this is true—that it was such an end to such a life that breaks every barrier down and gives to Christ upon the Cross a power to win us to love and worship greater than, without it, he could ever have possessed. If, then, it

is love which is God, and to love is the first and great commandment, that which evokes our love is truly that by which we are saved. We are "saved by the blood of the Lamb": I believe it with all the conviction of those who use the phrase most familiarly, though they may reject my interpretation of it.

To me this is the Atonement. Christ has revealed to us what love really is, to what heights it can rise and what it can and must achieve. I believe that love is God, and in Christ I see what God is. He does not, I now see, abandon us to our grief. He is not content to let us suffer. He does not argue that we have deserved all that has come upon us. He is not concerned to judge but to save.[1] How childish and how small seems all our concern for his offended Majesty! How meanly human our idea that he is weighing our sins in a balance and demanding a victim!

God in his home in heaven could not rest, being love: he must seek for the lost and try to re-enter and repossess the universe. We do not know how that loss was possible, but, seeing ourselves lost in perplexity and pain, we do see, dimly in one another, perfectly in Christ, how he has sought to win us again. This is the meaning of that ancient majestic phrase: "The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." When God gave us freedom of choice he took the risk which ended on Calvary. This is what the gift of free will has cost him. This is the cost at which we grow noble. The drama of the incarnation is repeated everywhere, for everywhere God seeks to become incarnate and make us all his own again: the tragedy of the crucifixion took

[1] John iii. 17.

place not nineteen hundred years ago at Jerusalem, but wherever any one has seen God and received him, and tried to show him to mankind, and been stoned or stabbed or crucified for his pains.

To-day, as always, men cry out in derision: "If thou be the Lord of the Universe, come down from the Cross! Save thyself and us!" And the reply to-day is always the same: "He saved others; himself he cannot save."

This is the Atonement. Vicarious punishment is a horrible imagination: it is a lie. Vicarious suffering is a fact. God could save us by no other way than this, and at no less cost. He could, indeed, put an end to our suffering by putting an end to us. This would be simple, but it would not be love. I marvel that those who cry out against God for not stopping the war, or preventing the infliction of suffering by the guilty upon the innocent, do not see it. If I were God, surely I should weary of the human race and put it out of its misery! No one with a heart of love can look on at our suffering and not pity us. Even if we have brought it all upon ourselves even if it is all our fault, we must be pitied. How simple to put an end to it all—to destroy the freedom which we have used so ill! Why does not God save himself and us from all this pain?

I believe he could. I do not share the modern idea that God himself is helpless or at least not omnipotent. I find what Christ said of Pilate true of us all: "thou could'st have no power at all against me except it were given thee from on high." It has actually been given to us by God, this dread freedom to do right or wrong, this power to crucify

him; and it will not be taken away. In this is the last proof of God's love.

Omnipotence is not the power to do contradictory things but to do all things that are possible to be done. To make us at once free and not free is not possible, and to demand it in the name of the omnipotence of God is not to invoke omnipotence but chaos. God can leave us free or he can destroy us—for to destroy our free will is to destroy us—but he cannot make us free and unfree at once.

I believe, moreover, that God cannot destroy even one of us without in some mysterious sense maiming us all. The worst cannot be sacrificed without loss to the best. If one member suffer all the body suffers with it. We find it hard to bear this in mind—hard to accept—but it is true. If we forget the basic facts of life, God does not. We are *solidaire* whether we choose to remember it or not. This is God's answer to those who plead for the destruction at least of the most wicked among us.

He will not destroy us. We, when we see some small tormented animal for which we do not care, will put it out of its misery. An impulse of compassion will make us hastily kill the fly whose wings some heedless child has torn away. It is nothing to us, but we pause a moment to put it out of its pain and very likely suffer in imagination more than the fly can. We hesitate to kill an animal we love. An injured dog or horse we take to the surgeon, and, though we may say, "if you cannot cure it, put an end to it," we give it a chance. We let it suffer, even a good deal, in the hope of recovery. We think its recovery worth that suffering because we love it.

We never say of a child, "put it out of its pain."

The child is too precious for that. We may suffer in watching it suffer; because of our superior knowledge we may suffer much more than it suffers. I think grown-up people often do. But we dare not say "let it die." We must let it suffer even when our hearts cry out against the suffering. Even when love hardly plays a conscious part, some instinct rises up against the destruction of a human life. We dare not, even to spare the cost of agony, put an end to it.

Shall not the patience of God with all our evil and our pain be interpreted in terms of love? Is it not because we are too precious in his sight to be destroyed, that he allows us to suffer—and is willing to suffer with us?

That he does suffer I cannot doubt. It may be heresy, but, if God is love, how can he stand apart from our pain without sharing it? It is inconceivable. It is of the essence of love that it shares, and though I cannot conceive the suffering of God—because it is altogether beyond my human mind—I can see that Christ suffered and was bound to suffer—could not escape suffering. The anger I should feel against a God who could, omniscient, know all our pain and be unmoved by it, dies when I see Christ on the Cross. I know God cannot be less—less loving, less pitiful—than Christ. Once more I realise that God is in Christ reconciling me and all the world to himself.

I do not know how all this pain and sin has come about, but I know that the cost of it to God is so much more than to me that I cannot measure it. Why does he endure it? Why did he accept crucifixion "from the foundation of the world"?

Because he loves us enough even for this. "Herein is love; not that we loved him but that he first loved us. . . . We love him because he first loved us."

Seeking his lost world, and entering in wherever he could find a way of entering, it was inevitable that the Crucifixion should come. When Christ, his only-begotten Son, the one who perfectly received him and is perfectly his own, tried to show us how we also should live so as to be in truth the children of God, the beauty of the vision was too much for us. In this sense we may say that Judas was foreordained to betray Jesus. If he had not done it some one else must have done it!

Yes—some one would have done it. It did not take Judas alone to crucify Christ. The priests who accused and condemned him, the Roman ruler who delivered the judgment, the faithless friends who forsook him and fled, the fickle mob who demanded the crucifixion, the soldiers who carried it out—it took all these to kill Jesus Christ, and among one or other of these we all have stood at times. Was it all foreordained? In a sense it was: it was foreseen: I think it was inevitable. Those who receive God are too glorious to be hidden. We see them and at first we love them; but then we envy them, or feel they ask too much of us, or shrink from the dread contrast between their lives and ours.

This is what happened with Christ. In him men saw the spirit of God himself revealed. In him they saw also what all men ought to be. He told them how they too should live and what manner of kingdom they would, if they so lived, bring about on earth. They flocked to him and listened with joy to

his words. Who could refuse to love him? Who fail to be ravished by his great promises? The common people heard him gladly.

And as they listened and he spoke they began to understand him better. They began to count the cost of the things he promised. The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a merchant seeking goodly pearls who, when he heard of one pearl of great price, sold all that he had and went and bought it. All that he had! But this is terrible! Who is ready to give so much? It is impossible to give so much!

A chill fell upon them. They walked with him no more. Then they began to wish they had never walked with him at all. It was not easy to forget, once they had heard; not easy to give up that heavenly vision and return to the dull round of a narrow, sordid life again. If he had only let them alone they would never have thought of anything better. If they had never seen him they would have had no haunting sense of loss. They began to hate him—to be sure that he was wrong—to hope he might be wrong—to wish at least that he should be silent—that they might be rid of him and his terrible love and beauty, and be free to go back to their comfortable materialism.

> "For O, the Master is so fair,
> His smile so sweet to banished men,
> That those who meet him unaware
> Can never rest on earth again."

This is why the slaying of the prophets is so certain. God comes into the world at his peril! We ask to see him, but we dare not when we can. His beauty is too great for us: we cannot cease to desire it and

yet we cannot pay the price. We wish to be left in our complacent smug materialism: we dread the advent of the Spirit. We cry out in pain against it. We turn in fury upon those who show us its power. We too join in that age-old shout: "Crucify him." Let him be dead and buried. Put a stone upon his sepulchre. Make it as sure as you can.

We cannot look upon ourselves in the light of God's love—we cannot see humanity as he would have it to be—without an agony of shame and grief. As Peter, when he saw it, cried, "Depart from me for I am a sinful man, O Lord," so do we; and since he will not depart we seek to kill him.

This is the cost of our redemption to God. Vicarious suffering is not a doctrine; it is a fact. When we have done our worst and killed the one who alone was truly godlike and God, then only will we see and repent and worship. By his stripes we are healed.

Human beings in an agony of shame and resentment put Christ to death. If they had not, they could never have known how altogether perfect he was. Afterwards, they did know, and saw that the man they had put to death was the man we would all be if we could. They knew that once at least a human being had been perfectly what God desired. When, therefore, they draw near to God they hide behind this Christ. They put him forward as the one who can show that humanity is worth saving. They make their prayers in his name. They feel that they are justified in him.

This is why we pray to God "in Christ's name" and "for his sake." This is why we think of him as the "propitiation" for our sins.

Since this word, like the "Atonement," has become a horror to many people, let us consider it not as a theological doctrine at all but, like the Atonement, as a fact in human experience.

Vicarious suffering does, as a matter of fact, redeem us: we have known it happen. The suffering of the innocent, brought about by our sins, has again and again checked us in mid-career and brought us to our senses again.

Atonement was needed between God and man, for men were angry with God. It was achieved by Jesus Christ, for no man could be angry with him, and in him we can all see God.

So also, as a simple fact, we do find in Christ the propitiation for our sins. No words are more true to Christian experience than these—

> "Look, Father, look on his anointed face,
> And only look on us as found in him.
> Look not on our misusings of thy grace,
> Our prayer so languid and our faith so dim;
> For lo, between our sins and their reward
> We set the Passion of thy Son our Lord."

Let us rule out the theological doctrine. Let us forget the idea of God and the idea of sin and think of it in another way. Suppose there is not any God: suppose there is not any sin. These are theological terms, and we are looking for something purely human—something in our own experience. We have friends, and to these friends we sometimes have done wrong; and when we realise that we have done wrong we want to be forgiven. On what grounds do we ask for excuse? With what words shall we say "forgive me"? We ask to be believed

when we say that we will not so offend again; or if, perhaps, we cannot even promise that, knowing how often we have failed already, at least we ask that it may be believed of us that we do not want to do it again. We would not do it again if we could help. We ask to be forgiven, not so much for what we are as for what we wish to be and may be.

In a sense, what we hope to be and intend to be is what we actually are. We have a sort of shadowy *right* to be forgiven when we are sorry, because when we are sorry we reject the fault—our will rejects it; our will is right; and that shows what we may some day become. Can the injured person care enough for the "me" that does love him and that does not want to injure him? Will he perceive that the good "me" is the essential "me," and, for the sake of that, however small it is, forgive?

Whenever we ask to be forgiven it is on such grounds that we find courage to ask it. We do not argue it all out in this way, perhaps, but it is what we really mean. "Believe in me enough to think that I shall some day become a good friend." The wish does imply the thing. The acorn is not the oak, and yet it is the oak in a sense that the beech-nut is not. The beech-nut is not the beech, and yet it is the beech in a sense that the acorn is not.

> "All the music of the moon
> Sleeps in the plain eggs of the nightingale."

What does the poet mean by that? Can an egg sing? Or is there music in an egg? Is there even any sentient being in an egg? Yet it is true that all the

music of the moon does sleep in the plain eggs of the nightingale as it does not sleep in the eggs of the thrush, the cuckoo, or the sparrow.

There is truth in our plea when we say, "Because there is something in me that is good, since I do love you and am sorry for what I did wrong, will you believe that that is really myself, and for the sake of that forgive me?"

Christ is to humanity what that spark of goodness is to us. Christ is in us individually in that spark of goodness. That is his Spirit and, in a little way, it is ours also: and in a great way it passes from the individual to the human race. We recognise Christ as the best that we have done. We believe that Christ is the divine Idea of Humanity, the Word of God to Man, made flesh. Or we think only: "this is the best that humanity has produced." In either case Christ is to the race itself what the spark of goodness in us is to us individually.

The goodness of Christ belongs to the human race just as my little spark of goodness belongs to me; and since humanity has produced this perfect human being, it has as much right to claim to speak in his name as it has a right to blush for all the sins it has committed against him. We have a right—a sort of right—to ask to be forgiven for the sake of the fact that we repent these things. There is goodness enough in us to be sorry with, and so we have a right to be forgiven. There is goodness enough in the human race to have made it possible for the Spirit of God to become incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, and so, instinctively, we say: "for the sake of that, for that which after all humanity does share in—for that which

we recognise as the best of all—be pitiful with all the human race!"

> "Look, Father, look on his anointed face,
> And only look on us as found in him."

If we humans could only produce a Judas Iscariot, or an impenitent thief, or such weak friends of Christ as forsook him and fled, it is an open question whether it would really be merciful of God to let us go on existing. What do such creatures as we, crawling between earth and heaven—if that were all!

But it is not all. There is Christ also. "Look on his anointed face and only look on us as found in him." After all, it is worth while to save us. There is something of Christ in all of us—something, in spite of all that we have done that is wrong. It is worth while to bear with us and to forgive us, for such as Christ is we, who are also human beings, may one day become. We recognise in him our elder brother, but we also are the children of God—his very little brothers and sisters, but still of the same family and the same race. For his sake be not weary of us!

How weary we are of ourselves! How impatient of our own failures! Is it conceivable that God should be patient still? Yes; because he sees in us, even when we cannot see it in ourselves, that spark of goodness which makes us Christ. In the sense that the acorn is the oak and the nightingale's eggs are the music of the nightingale, in that sense humanity is Christ. It will some day grow up to the measure of the stature of the fulness of him. How then should God be weary of us? He sees Christ

and knows that this also, this alone, is the final truth about the human race. Christ is the propitiation for our sins.

Whatever any human being does, in that we are entitled to claim a share: it belongs to us all. Somewhere in the back of our minds we feel when we read of some heroic act (of which in fact we are incapable) a kind of sympathetic and generous pride that we also are human beings. A young painter, seeing a supremely great picture, said to himself with proud humility, *ed io son pittore*—"I also am a painter!" I, too, belong to the glorious band of which one of us has produced this perfect thing! We rejoice to read of great and glorious deeds, to recognise the doers of them as our brothers, and take a not wholly vicarious joy in what they did.

This we do when we are at our best. When we do not feel so, it is because we are moved with a mean spirit of jealousy: we are vexed to think that some one can do so much better than we. But at our best we take a pride in thinking that we too belong to the race of men, as did they who did these things.

So we say to God: "Will you not look at us as part of the same great family—as having the spirit of Christ?" Against our vindictiveness, our resentment, our rancour, we set the Christ who said when he was crucified, "Forgive them: they know not what they do." We ask God to look at that, and he does. Against our lack of love we set the love of Jesus. We ask God to look at that, as something which in a sense we share when we love any one at all. We, too, are of that great company of lovers whose head and chief is Jesus Christ, and God is

just and sees that it is so. Christ is the propitiation for our sins. God recognises and admits our plea.

> "Look, Father, look on his anointed face,
> And only look on us as found in him"

(and we are found in him)

> "Look not on our misusings of thy grace,
> Our prayer so languid and our faith so dim;
> For lo, between our sins and their reward
> We set the Passion of thy Son our Lord."

Chapter XVI.

Belief in Hell

One of the words that has most lost its meaning for twentieth-century people is the word "hell." I cannot remember ever hearing a sermon on the subject of hell. I suppose they used to be very common. I gather from my researches that they were very common indeed, and that hell had a very real and terrible meaning to many people only a short time ago.

There is still a very real horror of the subject in the minds of many, but not so much because they believe in the existence of what used to be called "hell," as because they are revolted by a religion which teaches that such a thing as hell is possible. I do not believe that Christ taught this horrible doctrine, but there is a sense in which I believe in hell.

The teaching of the Bible on this subject is much less definite than we are accustomed to think. The Old Testament presents us with no consistent body of belief in any after-life at all, whether in hell or heaven. It is impossible to find more than a few ambiguous and scattered phrases suggesting that the writers believed in life after death, and of these it is difficult to be sure whether they refer to Jews only or to others, and if to Jews, whether the righteous only or all had a chance of survival after

death. Moreover, if any existence after death was expected, it is difficult to discover what sort of an existence it was supposed to be. The words used are those of people groping in darkness and too uncertain of their ground to make their thoughts clear to us. There is, in fact, no clear and consistent teaching in the Old Testament as to the nature of the life after death, if life after death there be.

Even in the New Testament there is more confusion of thought than most people realise. There is undoubted assurance of immortality, but, beyond that, there is no consensus of opinion at all. Many, after superficial reading, have a vague idea that at some point it is decided whether we go to heaven or hell, and that in any case we go there at once and stay there for ever. Others hold the doctrine stated in hymns like "On the resurrection morning," which suggests that we do not go there at once (wherever "there" is) but remain in a state of suspended animation until the Judgment Day. The difficulty of deciding when the soul is judged, and what happens to it after it is judged, is not decided in the New Testament, and it is as difficult to extract from it a consistent and logical idea about future punishment or the future life as from the Old Testament. Whether the soul was judged at once or waited until the Second Coming of our Lord, and what would happen to those people who died before the Second Coming—when they were judged and what kind of fate overtook them—on these points we find conflicting opinions in the New Testament and, very naturally, in the minds of Christian people also.

We have to bear in mind that the words "eternal,"

" everlasting," " for ever " did not bear the same meaning to ancient writers as they do to us. Explorers tell us that, among primitive races, people can count up to five or six, but are very vague about larger numbers. It seems to me that it is only our very scientific age which has begun to attach a perfectly definite meaning to such words as " eternal," " everlasting." " Eternal " originally meant " for an age "—æonian—for ages. When people used these words, they meant to convey the idea of a very great number or a very long time. In the Book of Enoch the prophet speaks of an existence that goes on " to life everlasting, even five hundred years." By " everlasting " he clearly did not mean what we should mean. Elsewhere he speaks of the soul remaining in blazing flames " burning worse than fire," where they shall " remain and be cursed for ever " : but at the same time he says that the Creator will " rejoice at their destruction : they shall be slain in Sheol." It looks again as though the words " for ever " meant something vaguer than they would mean to us. To us, a person who was going to burn " for ever " could not also be " destroyed " or he would cease burning. A great deal of the difference between our views to-day and those held in the past turn exactly on this point—as to whether the soul is in fact destroyed, in the sense of being annihilated, or whether it continues to live and to suffer to all eternity.

I believe that God is love, and all my other beliefs are subject to this supreme belief. On whatever point of doctrine we are left in uncertainty by difficulties of language, differences of opinion, or errors of scribes and translators, one thing about

which we are left in no doubt whatever is that Christ believed in a God of love. If we grasp that, and consider all other things in the light of this supreme truth, we shall not wander far from the mind of Christ himself.

Some people have been able to believe that the eternal punishment (using the word eternal in its modern sense) of guilty or not perfectly innocent souls is compatible with the love of God. The question that we twentieth-century people have to decide is whether they are right. It is true that they are of all Churches and of all ages. Farrar tells us that not a few only have preached this terrible doctrine of physical torment in hell. "Such passages," he says, "may be adduced from thousands of writers of every class, both Romanist and Protestant, both Anglican and Nonconformist, in every age from the third century to the nineteenth,"[1] and he goes on to justify what he says by quotations. He quotes from Bede, Thomas Aquinas, St Bonaventura, Sir Thomas More, Calvin, and others. So mild and lovable a soul as St Francis de Sales is at one with the great Protestant reformer on the one hand and with Ignatius Loyola on the other, in this dread belief. According to Calvin, the souls of the guilty are "harassed by a dreadful tempest; they shall feel themselves torn asunder by an angry God, and broken by the weight of his hand, and transfixed and penetrated by mortal stings, terrified by the thunderbolt of God. So that to sink into any gulf would be more tolerable than to stand for a moment in these terrors." And Loyola: "Let us fancy we see hell, and imagine what is worse to behold—a

[1] "Mercy and Judgment," chap. iv. F. W. Farrar.

horrible cavern full of black flames. Sulphur, devils, dragons, fire, swords, arrows, and innumerable damned who roar in despair. Imagine the worst you can, and then say, all that is nothing compared to hell."

Jonathan Edwards in 1758—not so very long ago, after all—said: "Here all judges have a mixture of mercy, but the wrath of God will be poured out upon the wicked without mixture. Imagine yourself to be cast into a fiery oven . . . and that your body were to lie there for a quarter of an hour, full of fire, as full within and without as a bright coal fire, all the while full of quick sense: what horror would you feel at the entrance of such a furnace? Oh, then, how would your heart sink if you knew that after millions and millions of ages your torment would be no nearer to an end than ever it was! But your torment in hell will be immensely greater than this illustration represents."

There is one redeeming feature, however, in Jonathan Edwards—he does think that hell is a terrible thought. What is so astounding about some of these writers is that they think the spectacle of the damned suffering in hell will be exhilarating! St Thomas Aquinas says: "The saints may enjoy their beatitude more thoroughly, and give more abundant thanks to God, for a perfect sight of the punishment of the damned is granted to them." Luther, when asked whether the blessed would not be saddened by seeing their nearest and dearest tortured in hell, answered, "Not the least in the world," and Gerhard says that "the blessed will see their friends and relations among the damned as often as they like without the least compassion." Even

Jonathan Edwards in his more relentless moments shares this view: "The view of the misery of the damned will double the ardour of the love and gratitude of the saints in heaven." Andrew Wellwood speaks of the saints as "overjoyed in beholding the torment of the wicked as a passing delectation."

People have different ideas about what is delectable and, to the twentieth-century person, the idea that the sight of hell will increase the joys of heaven is almost comic because it is so utterly impossible. Bishop Gore tells us that we cannot be "altogether shut up" to the "almost intolerable belief" in an eternity of torment. If to the human heart and to the human imagination, so easily wearied and seeing such a little way, the thought of the eternal torment of the lost is "almost intolerable"—and I think most of us would drop out the "almost"—how is it possible to suppose that God, who sees and knows all, and who is not really loving but love itself, could find it tolerable? We must either abandon the belief that God is love or say boldly that there is no such hell as our forefathers believed. The two things cannot both be true.

If we judge Christ by his teaching as a whole, must we not say that he revealed to the world a God of love much more certainly and clearly than an eternal hell? Putting it at the broadest and simplest, and including all that is doubtful in his teaching, the governing feature which has irradiated his faith to the world is the belief that God is love. All the rest, therefore, must be considered in the light of that teaching, and to us who are still very slow of heart and dull of imagination it does at least seem to be

inconceivable that what would be an agony to us to see or to believe should not be far more terrible—in fact must be impossible—to a God who is love.

So, many people have fallen back on the belief that the soul that sins does die in the literal sense of the word. They cannot believe that there will be suffering through eternity: therefore they incline to the belief that the soul which continually chooses wrong, which has always and throughout the ages, not in this life only but through unimagined ages in worlds past, present, and to come rejected God, in the end ceases to be. Is not the idea of annihilation, however, contrary to all that we know about life and the world? We have begun to realise that nothing is destroyed. Matter is never destroyed; how much less can spirit be destroyed? Since the body cannot be destroyed but only changed, resolved into its elements, is it possible that spirit can die? Is it possible for that which has once existed to be entirely as though it had never been? To be annihilated? I confess that, in the presence of modern science, I find this increasingly difficult to believe. The soul may indeed be changed: it may go through some such process as Browning describes when he speaks of that—

> "Sad, obscure, sequestered state,
> Where God unmakes but to remake the soul
> He else had made in vain, which must not be."

But it cannot escape from God by ceasing to be. The belief that all souls must ultimately come back to God and be what, in theological language, we call "saved," I base on this conviction: that it is in fact both love and justice that the soul should be

treated so. I know that the fear underlying the opposition to this "universalism" is a right and noble fear that we are becoming sentimental and, by being sentimental, are unjust. The sentimental are always unjust, and it seems to the stern sense of justice, which perhaps all of us have in the bottom of our souls, that there must be some final choice; that, however long the love of God may forbear, however long his patience may hold out, the soul that persists in sin must die. It is urged that if there is no finality in any moral choice but in the end we must always unchoose, must all at last go back to the right, then there is no real justice and no real vindication of the moral law. After all, the things that we have done are in a sense irrevocable. We may change, we may regret them, we may become different and better people, but the thing we did goes on. Therefore (it seems) it cannot be just that in the end all these things shall be wiped out and every soul shall be with God.

Does St Paul's universalism—his faith that the time shall come when "God shall be all in all"[1]—really imply a violation of justice? Are those who believe in the ultimate salvation of all souls evading the final moral issue which faces every one who claims any kind of freedom? Are we taking cover in a sentimental horror at the idea that any one should be damned?

Suppose that the love of God, like God himself, is eternal and unconditioned by our deserving or undeserving: that the infinite love of God is matched against our finite resistance. Is it possible to believe that in the end the issue will be the defeat

[1] 1 Corinthians xv. 28.

of God? There is a deeper logic than that which suggests that the soul, if it is free, must be allowed to choose annihilation. There is this logic: that to match the finite hatred of the human soul against the infinite love of God is to challenge a foregone conclusion; and yet it is not a conclusion which destroys the freedom of the soul, because love is the one power which never works by coercion. It is the soul that responds at last: it is not that the soul is ever coerced.

The justice to which we appeal is satisfied by such a belief because it implies that the love of God will never leave the sinner. "There is mercy with thee, therefore shalt thou be feared!"[1] The soul which seeks to escape from God for whom it was made is always restless. There is no sadness like the sadness of the great sceptics, no despair so profound as the despair of paganism. The idea that Christianity is a gloomy creed disappears when one reads such a book as the "Meditations of Marcus Aurelius" with its tragic despair of life.

I conceive the soul hunted by God "across the nights and the days,"[2] never leaving us, because he cannot leave us. Neither can we be content. There is still something of the divine in all of us which hungers and thirsts for God, however hard we try to drive it out. Those who are born with the divine spirit cannot be satisfied with less than the divine, or those who have seen the beatific vision be satisfied to forget it. So, like Judas Iscariot, we may seek to escape by annihilation, but that also is denied us. "There is mercy with thee; therefore shalt thou be feared."

[1] Psalm cxxx. 4. [2] "The Hound of Heaven." Francis Thompson.

In the last circle of Dante's hell there are no flames and heat but ice and cold: in St John's Gospel we are told that when Judas went out to betray his Lord "it was night." The cold and darkness of estrangement from God stings the soul into a realisation of what it has lost. This is the death which comes to the soul that has sinned—this darkness, this cold. But to escape is impossible, for we seek to escape One who is everywhere, to wear out a patience that is infinite, to pass beyond the reach of a love that has no bounds. There is no peace for the wicked, and in the inexhaustible mercy of God there is something that is to be feared.

When at last we realise this and turn to him to "remake the soul," by what tragic steps we must retrace our path! For, like Saul, we may become Paul in a moment, as time is measured: the sinner, the persecutor, the bigot becomes the ardent follower of Christ and knows the joy which God reserves for those who turn to him. Yet though, in an instant, he passes over to the side of God, again and again he must suffer a hell of pain for the things which he has done. I often wonder if that fiery Paul did not meet, afterwards, when he was Christ's saint, some soul which his persecution had hardened into something harder still. When he had become the follower of Christ, did he never meet some other who, from his example, Pharisee of the Pharisees, had learned to persecute as he had persecuted, who had followed the path that he took—that Saul took—but not made the turning that Paul made? Or some timid soul which had found Christ but, before the fiery breath of persecution, lost him again? I suppose that even in those early days

there must have been some who saw Christ and shrank from him in the hour of peril. They were not altogether different from ourselves, these early Christians. There may have been some sensitive and lovely soul to whom the appeal of this Jesus was as lovely as it can only be to those who are intensely sensitive—irresistible in its beauty and tenderness in a brutal world. Such a soul meets a revelation of Christ with ardour; but such a soul is also very likely to faint and fail in the hour of peril. Is it to be believed that Paul never met either one or other of these—that he never came across the dark traces of his own steps in the wrong direction? That, seeing them, he with all his knowledge of the love of God did not sometimes feel that he was in hell? The very mercy of God which made Paul realise what God was, must have made it agony for him to see some other soul whom he had deprived of that beatific vision.

Those who say that to believe all souls will be saved at last is to pervert the ends of justice do not understand the capacity of the human soul to suffer. The more we are on the side of God the more sensitive we become to evil. Horror of evil to the pure and noble is a thousand times greater than to the ordinary man. It is, in a measure, the horror that God feels. It is the horror that broke the heart of Christ, who, because he was sinless, was broken in body and soul at the sight of the world's sin. It is this which crucifies God. It is this which makes him the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, and as we ourselves draw near to God we begin to feel some of that sensitiveness to evil which may crucify us also in the end. But for us there is added

the knowledge that we ourselves have helped to make that great sum of evil; that the sea of the world's tears is a little deeper and a little salter for the tears that we have made others shed; the sum of the world's pain and sin heavier, its darkness greater because of us. This is hell, and verily we shall not come out thence till we have paid the uttermost farthing.[1]

Does the loss of belief in everlasting torment take from our religion its urgency? Perhaps for a time it does or has. The relief was so great that a pleasant conviction of the genial amiability of the Almighty replaced in the minds of some the fear of the Lord in which all children were formerly brought up. "It will be all right whatever we do; in fact it is all right. We have only to be sure of this and nothing need trouble us." Such is the easy-going religion of to-day.

But if we feel like this it is not because we are followers of Christ. His God is awful and just and his mercy has in it a quality which makes it to be feared. If I believe (as I do) that our Lord proclaimed a merciful God, I am no less impressed with his unflinching stress upon the terrible quality of his justice. I for one do not find the Kingdom of God easy to live in or easy to attain.

One of the sayings of Christ which has troubled most of us at some time or other is on this very point. The way to destruction, he says, is broad and easy to find, but "strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth to eternal life, and few there be that find it."[2] This also is better understood if we realise that our Lord's sayings are not commands or threats,

[1] Matthew v. 26. [2] Matthew vii. 14.

in the sense in which we generally understand these words. They are descriptions of what actually is: they are statements of fact. When the scientist speaks of a "law," he means that he is telling us what is. We do not argue as to whether it is just or unjust that the law of gravitation should govern the universe. The very words "law" and "govern" are metaphors. What we call "the law of gravitation" is only a description of what actually happens, and no one argues as to whether it is just or unjust that it should happen so. We accept it, in so far as we believe that it has been correctly stated, and we try to govern our lives in accordance with the ascertained fact.

A great deal of light is thrown on our religious difficulties if we realise that Christ had this scientific attitude of mind, and that the saying, "Strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leads unto life, and few there be that find it," is not a doctrine or a threat but a description of fact.

There are in sound an infinity of notes, or rather a continuous range of sounds, so low that the human ear cannot catch it and so high that the human ear loses it again. We only hear a few notes of what, being myself human, I naturally call the middle of the scale—because it happens to be the bit that I can hear! At any moment in the playing of a piece of music or the singing of a melody, there is in the infinite range of sound one note and only one that is right. We do not think this unjust. We realise that it is in the nature of things that only one note is right and all the rest are wrong.

When our own wishes and desires do not enter in too much, we see also that there is in conduct no

arbitrary God who insists that we find the right note on peril of eternal damnation. There *is* only one note that is right: all the other notes are wrong. Strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leads to perfect music, and few there be that find it.

No one flies into a rage or arraigns the justice of God because there is only one note in the melody that is right. It is in the nature of music that it is so, and it is in the nature of life that the path of perfection is a razor edge of narrowness. We slip from one side to the other and find ourselves out of harmony, singing the wrong note, playing the wrong tune, not because God is narrow or unjust, but because perfection is in the nature of things narrow and to the right and left of it is error.

A right response to the difficulties of life is like the perfect playing of a piece of music. It looks effortless, it seems easy; but it is the result of hours and years of discipline. Only one who has always sought for the right path, who has disciplined himself day after day through times of dreariness, discouragement, and despair can, when the supreme moment comes, answer it with a supremely right and perfect word or act. The slack, undisciplined, disordered soul can no more achieve that perfection than an unskilled musician can rival the perfection of a great one when the moment comes that he desires to do so. There is a perfect way of meeting every situation—not a good way, but a perfect way. This way Christ found. Hence a beauty like music in all that he did.

And this is the secret of his saying, "Strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leads to life, and few there be that find it." We shuffle along, for the most

part, doing well or ill, and God is merciful and doubtless will forgive us if we are also kind to one another. Yes—if we have only done kind things he will forgive us. But how often we make our very kindness ugly! How cold the righteous sometimes are! How cruel is our justice, how sentimental our mercy! How blind, how weak our love! Perhaps one of the worst things we can do in life is to do the right thing in the wrong way, for that makes people hate the right thing. But to have the virtue which, like Christ's, is full of freedom and of grace demands a lifelong discipline.

I believe that in the end it is only that in us which does attain to beauty that survives; only when we can reach that level, when for an hour—or perhaps only for an instant—we do the perfect thing, are we immortal. The—

> "Thoughts hardly to be packed
> Into a narrow act,
> Fancies that broke through language and escaped;
> All I could never be,
> All men ignored in me,
> This I was worth to God, whose wheel the pitcher shaped."

These were perfect—the rest must die. It is only beauty that is immortal. A phrase, a poem, a melody survives in proportion as it is beautiful. In that is the quality of immortality, and only that part of our lives that has reached it is immortal. Strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leads to immortality. It is a hard saying, but it is true to life—like all the sayings of Christ.

So true also is that other saying that puzzles many. "It is better to enter into eternal life maimed

and halt, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into hell." [1] This is the other side of the parable. There is nothing in heaven that is not perfect: nothing can be immortal that is not so. To me the sense of urgency which it is said modern religion has lost is in this teaching. It is true that if we desire God and goodness, and with all our failures go on desiring it, we cannot fail to find God. Kindness is of God, and every kind act meets with its response from him who is Love itself. Kindness is a quality which goes more with the sensualist than with the Pharisee. Doubtless it was this which made Christ like him better, and to prophesy that the publican and the harlot would go into the Kingdom of Heaven before the prig. Yet I cannot refrain from asking how much of the sensualist survives? How much of goodness is fine enough for heaven and can pass that strait and narrow gate at last? "What of soul was left, I wonder, when the kissing had to stop?" [2] What remains of the desire for God which alone brings us to God in the end?

To him that overcometh is promised the morning star. The writer puts these words into the mouth of Christ: "He that overcometh, I will give to him to sit down with me in my throne, as I also overcame and sat down with my Father in his throne." [3] And again: "To him that overcometh I will give the morning star." [4] What does that mean—the gift of the morning star? Light, wisdom, understanding—the reward of courage, the crown of victory. The

[1] Matthew xviii. 8. See also Mark ix. 43-47.
[2] "A Toccata of Galuppi." Robert Browning.
[3] Revelation iii. 21. [4] Revelation ii. 28.

one who fails again and again and finds life too hard—this life and the next and the next, perhaps, through æons of time—God will not shut out from heaven for ever. He enters maimed and halt and blind—blind to the eternal purpose of God but yet content, finding, even blindly, in that purpose his lasting peace: but to him that overcometh is given the morning star.

Browning speaks contemptuously of those half-hearted ones who arrive at some dim limbo, safe perhaps, but inglorious—

> "Only they see not God, I know,
> Nor hit soldier saints who, row on row,
> Burn upward each to his point of bliss."

Browning was no doubt one of those who found it easy to be brave, and perhaps such people are always a little hard on the rest of us; but he was right. Only the brave see God and understand life as he understands it. As for the weak well-intentioned—"they see not God, I know"—not in the sense that he sees God who shares with Christ, who overcame even as he overcame.

"If your eye offend you, pluck it out. It is better to enter into heaven having one eye than having two eyes to be cast into hell": but "to him that overcometh I will give the morning star."

Chapter XVII.

The Holy Spirit

Language is never felt to be more clumsy than when writing of the "Holy Spirit," and probably our use of the word "Person"—"the Third Person of the Trinity"—has created more difficulty in the minds of Christians than any other of our theological terms. It is a difficulty inherent in our language. We have no more got an exact translation of this idea in any English word than we have of the idea of the Logos, and it does not help the ordinary man to substitute "hypostasis" for "person." The substitution might, it is true, keep us in mind that the word "person" is not, at least in its modern use, at all what we want. The confusion which makes people hesitate whether to use the pronoun "he" or "it" remains a real confusion, in spite of the growing emphasis of most teachers on the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit of God is in everything: it is "immanent." Most people who believe in God believe this, and yet are troubled to know "what is the Holy Spirit." I hope I am not heretical when I say that this is the Holy Spirit.

Because this Spirit is in everything, it is also in us. It is that Spirit in us which enables us to love one another, to see truth, to desire beauty. As Clutton Brock said,[1] these are "ultimate" things. It is no

[1] "Ultimate Things." Clutton Brock.

use asking why people desire Love and Beauty and Truth. To such a question there is no answer. We love them because they are lovable. In this we go beyond mere reasoning and *see*. We disagree about the people and things that we love; we disagree about what is good; we disagree about what is beautiful and what is true. This is because we are certainly not wholly divine and materialism clouds our spirits, lies our truth. We cannot see clearly which is which, and, while the truth is one, lies are many and divide our judgment and ourselves from one another. Yet gradually the lies pass and truth remains. It is almost certain that the judgment of the human race on supreme works of art, knowledge of the truth, and real goodness, is just. It is on the smaller things that we continue to disagree—the lesser works of art, the ways and customs by which goodness expresses itself. On the supreme works of art we are one, and the Ming Tombs and the Taj Mahal seem as nobly beautiful to the Western as to the Eastern, to the American or European as to the Asiatic. So with goodness. We do not agree about marriage laws or laws of property, but all men everywhere agree in admiring courage, wisdom, and love.

The power we have slowly but surely to recognise and desire what is good and beautiful and true is the divine spirit in us—the Holy Spirit. This Spirit makes us the children of that Father who is in heaven and who is Spirit.[1]

At certain times our hunger and thirst for these things bring us to sudden insight. A climber, as he toils upwards, may be half-blinded by the sweat of

[1] John iv. 24 (Revised Version).

his labour, and unable to look back or round him for the very earnestness of his desire to reach the summit : he arrives—and suddenly he sees, it seems, half the world.

So the prophet reaches the mountain top and sees. So we, if we have gone along with him, see also. Or if we lag behind, may still be near enough to hear the trumpet voice proclaiming what he sees. Such a prophet, we say, has the Spirit of God, and so indeed he has. An age which hears and understands its prophets is a great age of the Spirit.

When Christ proclaimed to men the Kingdom of God, which he saw so glorious and so near, some of them heard but could not at first understand. They were too far away, and only dimly caught the words " kingdom " and " power." They read into his words the things they had expected him to say and so mistook. But when the material kingdom of power had failed to materialise, and Christ had been killed, they saw him again and understood at last. His kingdom was " not of this world "—not the glorification of material force and material possessions : it was the kingdom of the Spirit over matter. His enemies having done to Christ all the material harm they could, he remained unhurt.

The disciples understood. The truth blazed upon them like flames of fire. The Spirit of God took possession of them, body and soul, as never before in the history of mankind. This is what is called Pentecost—the first Whitsunday. It was the day and the hour when the Holy Spirit, which had seized prophets and saints of all religions through all ages, could pour itself out on crowds of men and women. " A new and unknown spiritual energy entered into

the process of human life."[1] "It shall come to pass in the last day, says God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams."[2]

To see visions—true visions: to dream dreams—true dreams: this is the work of the Holy Spirit in us.

Is it necessary to ask "what really happened" on the first Whitsunday? This happened! And it happens again and again in greater or in lesser measure, wherever men see God and recognise the truth about him. Such visions of glory unite the seers in a common spirit of joy. It seems that they all speak the same language; in the deepest sense of the word they do speak the same language. At least they understand one another, and that *is* language. Even literally this may be the case. I have been told, by one who was present, of a great meeting of Salvation Army evangelists from all over the world. The speakers addressed one another in different languages, but, when their speeches reached a certain point of fervour, the barriers of language were broken down and all the audience would unite in a mighty shout of rejoicing. It seemed that they understood each other and heard men speak with their own tongues the wonderful works of God. And, more profoundly, it is always true that "the seekers of the light are one." True-hearted men and women understand one another. St Louis of France and St Giles of Assisi—French monarch and Italian blacksmith—meeting each other for the first time remained silent and embraced for the space of half

[1] "The Life of Jesus." J. Middleton Murry. [2] Acts ii. 17.

an hour; and parted still without a word, having perfectly understood each other. Whether, therefore, men speak with tongues or remain in a communion of silence, where the Spirit is there is unity and understanding.

And this Spirit is poured out on all men, and makes them one with God. This is emphasised by St John when he says, "If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. . . . God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God and God in him."[1] This is not a fanciful but an exact saying. Neither is it a thought only found in Christian theology. Love, says Shelley, is—

> "Like the wide heaven, the all-sustaining air,
> It makes the reptile equal to the god."

"The loving worm within the sod" is "sublimer than the loveless god."[2] These words are true: Christ thought the same thing, for he said that we were to love one another in order that we might be the children of our Father.[3]

As he was the Son of God by virtue of the unity of his spirit with God, so do we by the same Spirit gain power to become the sons of God. We are enabled by this Spirit to enter into his purpose and to understand it because his Spirit is in us. When we were told in the first chapter of the Book of Genesis

[1] 1 John iv. 12, 13, and 16.
[2] Robert Browning.
[3] Matthew v. 44 and 45. "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven."

that God said "Let us make man in our image," this identity of spirit was expressed for us in the language of sublime poetry. A less sublime but more picturesque account given in another chapter expressed the same idea: "The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."[1]

In many religions—perhaps in nearly all—there is some recognition of the truth of this spiritual unity between God and his creatures. The more spiritual have known that it was a community of spirit between us and our Creator: the less spiritual have made gods in the shape of men. The underlying truth, nobly or ignobly expressed, is the same. The Spirit of God *is* immanent in us. This truth once realised explains much. Above all, it explains the nature of our conversion and redemption. The astonishing and to most of us preposterous belief that we are not the children of God until we have been baptised—an idea, nevertheless, firmly held by many orthodox Christians—becomes impossible. "He that *loveth* is born of God and knoweth God." Born of God—therefore the child of God: knowing God—therefore in the truest and deepest sense of the word his child.

The Holy Spirit, therefore, spoke by the prophets of old with authentic voice and did not wait either for the Incarnation or for Pentecost. From the beginning men, never wholly losing that divine image in which they were made, have heard the prophet and recognised the truth.

The process of recognition has, however, been

[1] Genesis ii. 7.

tragically slow. Though men dimly saw the truth, they were (and still are) involved in lies hardly less dear to them. Between truth and lies they wavered ; between belief in spiritual and material things. Often they killed the prophet of the truth before they would accept his message, trying (more logically perhaps than we realise !) the utmost that force could do against them, in order to try the measure of the power of truth !

At last a prophet appeared who was more than a prophet, more than a messenger of God ; one whose message was himself. Of him it was said that to those who received him he " gave power to become the sons of God." What does this mean ? Were we not the sons of God before ?

Truly we were, but as Christ was " the only-begotten son of the Father " because of his perfect unity of spirit with that Father, so do we become in a deeper and truer sense the sons of God through Christ.

The creative spirit of God—the Holy Spirit—is the spirit of love, and it is love alone that creates us in God's image. The Spirit moved on the face of the waters in the beginning, calling order out of chaos and life out of death. But creation was not the work of six days, finished six thousand years ago : it is a continual process, sustaining the universe in being.

The Spirit moves on our spirits too, calling us into the divine order, perpetually re-creating in us the image of God : but always the Spirit is the spirit of love.

Christ, showing us in himself a perfect man, creates us in that image by love. To see him is to

love him : to love him is at least to begin to resemble him. This is a spiritual law.

Few, if any of us, can love an abstract principle. The statement, for example, that " God is Love " moves us, maybe, to intellectual assent or contradiction. It is when we see beautiful things that we are moved to love and worship.

A perfect description of a perfect man would leave us cold even though admiring. The living Christ has moved the world of men to love and worship. This is his supreme service to us. He showed us God's purpose for us and made us in love with it. He lived the perfect human life, and we behold it full of grace and truth.

I think I should defy any one to know Jesus of Nazareth and not to love him. I wish we might cease, even if only for a time, to argue about his person and nature and be content to look at him. Sometimes I think it was his determination to make us do this that stopped him from writing his own gospel.

The gospel according to Jesus Christ ! What a thought ! How would it, we think at first blush, solve all our problems and make all things clear. But he wrote nothing—not a word. Once only he stooped and traced some letters in the dust. No one knows what they were, and the wind scattered the dust in which they were written. Their sole significance to us to-day, perhaps, is that they tell us that Christ could write—and did not.[1]

He left himself in the hands of men who wrote down, carefully no doubt, and inspired by a deep

[1] The education of a Jewish peasant boy at the time of Christ did not necessarily include writing.

and burning love for their Master, all that they could remember. Some things they forgot and some they did not understand, and some they set down wrongly. They all had different points of view and wrote for different sets of people, and these things unconsciously influenced what they wrote. In order to reach the real Christ we have laboriously to read, compare, and contrast what they said of him.

From such study there emerges a figure vital, beautiful, and convincing; but it would not be to us so living a person if we had been spared this labour of love. Christ did his best to save us from the worship of the letter when he refused to write for us a gospel. He has not saved us: I suppose no one could, since he did not. We still sin against the Spirit by our slavish literalism and violate our mental integrity by "believing" texts that flatly contradict each other. But he saved something, and the very labour which we have perforce expended on understanding and reconciling the four Gospels has brought us nearer to the spirit of Christ.

It is because of this that I believe so strongly in the necessity of being honest with Christ and with ourselves. It is as disastrous to allow ourselves to be bludgeoned by the Verbal Inspirationist into believing contradictory statements, as to accept the moral perfection of Christ, where our judgment would go against him, by those who terrify us with the word Deity. Both such "beliefs" stalemate our intelligence and literally prevent us from understanding the unique perfection of Christ even so far as we might.

I urge the study of the life of Christ in a spirit of courageous honesty, and I urge that honesty is not

only impossible if we have any mental reservations, but is also exceedingly difficult if we are always seeking to make a profit by our study of him. Applied science is well, but pure science comes first! The spiritual guides who advise us to meditate and to study, always in order that we may learn how to order our lives—and every morning do it that we may order the coming day—are dangerous counsellors. I do not mean that this should not be done; but not always. We should give our first, best thoughts to Christ without any ulterior motive at all. We treat other great men so and treat our friends so. We do not try to extract a manual of daily conduct from Plato or from Florence Nightingale: if we study them it is because we care for them. We do not *always* seek our friends for advice, for example, or for profit of any kind, except the exquisite profit of being with them. We have been too rarely encouraged to do this with Christ, and yet it is urgent that we should. The other method practised *alone* may lead to an external imitation of Christ, and "all imitations are bad, even the imitation of Christ."[1] What we seek is not an imitation but a unity of spirit.

This unity of spirit is created by love. I am convinced that no one who studies with care and intelligence the life of Christ, disregarding, perhaps, everything that has ever been said of him outside the Gospels, and carefully weighing even that, has failed in the end to love him. I make no prophecy whatever about any other conclusion that the careful student of the life of Christ may come to. I know well that the wisest and most devout have come to conclusions exceedingly diverse. I maintain only

[1] Clutton Brock.

and with conviction that such students will love him. And love assimilates what it loves: God creates in his own image.

In our everyday experience we know that this is true. Instinctively we like children to be under the influence of high-minded teachers, in the companionship of good and not of evil-minded children. We see them, with the charming extravagance of youth, imitate some hero's look and gait and speech. This external imitation is, we know, the childish expression of something much deeper. It was said, for example, that every boy who passed through Rugby under Arnold's head-mastership bore the stamp of his spirit for ever.

The most moving example of this creation of love in its own image, by the power of love, is St Francis of Assisi. The saint meditated upon the life and death of Christ, and was moved by his meditation to a passion of love. It is said that the marks of our Lord's suffering were at last reproduced in his body, and that his hands and feet and side bore the print of the five wounds. What was once dismissed as a pious legend is now very commonly received as quite possible and even likely to be true. The stigmata, however, were only the external signs of a unity of spirit much deeper. St Francis, by constant dwelling on the life and teaching of Christ, loved him; and loving, became like him. Men even said that he was Christ himself come to earth again, or, if not, then at the least Christ's younger brother. By the same right that makes us call Jesus the only-begotten Son of God, they called Francis his younger brother — by their unity of spirit.

Such is the divine miracle of creation wrought by love, and so does our God create us in his own image. It happens not only to a St Francis of Assisi: it happens every day. Christ's spirit is born in those who love him.

This is "conversion": this is that "second birth" of which an old-fashioned theology made so much, and rightly. But conversion has come to mean to many people an almost magical process, and as such it is discredited. I have heard it described in language that suggested a sudden seizure of the soul by an external power, and I have known Christians wait in an agony of doubt and fear for something to happen which they began to fear never would happen to them at all. If it did not, then they were reprobate and condemned to perdition.

Fear cannot move to love, and nothing is more pathetic than such a state of mind.

The very idea that God will so irrationally condemn all who are not able to believe in and to love him makes both love and belief almost impossible. How can one love a God so unjust, or believe in such injustice on the part of the Ruler of the Universe? Shall not the Judge of all the World do right? The more we realise what it is that is implied by conversion as described by many who declare that they have experienced it, the more impossible it becomes to us even to hope that it may be our experience also. We realise that such conversions can be brought about generally only by raising the emotional temperature to a pitch at which mere reason is—not transcended—but suffocated and, in a frenzied determination to be saved at any price, the convert abandons the effort to understand or to

reason, and declares in the words of a popular hymn —"I *do* believe, I *will* believe!"

I do not find in this heated atmosphere of emotional revivalism the operation of the Holy Spirit, though I realise that to earnest souls conversion may come at any time and anywhere. I believe that when such conversions take place, though they may seem the work of a moment or an hour, they are no more truly so than an earthquake is. Nothing seems more sudden—nothing more unforeseen and unforeseeable—than an earthquake: but it is due to long-gathering explosive forces under the earth's surface, and is only apparently sudden.

St Paul's conversion seemed sudden, but we know that his life, before it took place, had been given with zeal and even with fury to the pursuit of righteousness as he understood it. It has been suggested that the very frenzy of his wrath against the new sect of Christians—which led him to persecute them, breathing fire and slaughter—arose from a growing and alarming suspicion in his own mind that they were right. Whether that was so or not, St Paul himself tells us that he had been zealous for the God he knew when he met Christ in the way, and saw the glory of another and more glorious God.

I think it is always so. The realisation of the beauty of holiness as seen in Christ may come like a flash of lightning, but is no more really unprepared for than lightning is. Those to whom such revelations have never come may have seen as clearly though by the slow light of the growing day.

We cannot force ourselves to be converted: but since I believe that the whole process of the world's

redemption lies in our willingness to co-operate with a God who is always willing to co-operate with us, I cannot believe that we must wait idly in expectation of a spiritual miracle. Such a miracle would be a breaking of law indeed, for it is contrary to all law that a great spiritual result should follow on mere idleness of the spirit. We cannot convert ourselves, for conversion is the work of the Holy Spirit, but we can make it possible or impossible for the Spirit to do its work in us.[1]

I wish that our belief in the miraculous were always subject to law; we should then be able to work the miracles that we desire—even conversion.

The miracle of life which stirs in the seed and brings it at last to harvest is a miracle still to seeing eyes and understanding minds, though the scientist can describe the process and the agricultural expert tell us how to get the harvest best. A man who should sow his field with salt, or without preparation, or with the wrong kind of grain, and then expect the right kind and quantity of harvest is not a deeply religious man; he is a fool. The man who, having done all things wisely and reaped his rich result, imagines that he makes the seed grow or knows why it grows is a fool also. But some religious people expect a harvest of true and lasting conversion from a stupefying emotional appeal, and some, having had the process explained to them by psychological experts, imagine that it is no longer a miracle: and these two kinds of fool do not recognise their folly.

It is a spiritual (or psychological) law that love creates in its own image, but I do not imagine that

[1] "Quench not the Spirit."—1 Thess. v. 19.

when this law is stated the strange process of creation is now "explained." I believe that we begin to know how to work the miracle, and I find it not a whit less miraculous for that.

I wish that all who love goodness would study the Gospels, for here they will find a record of goodness unsurpassed in human history. Whatever flaws men may find in the character of Jesus, they will agree that, taken all in all, he was a Man indeed. He was, moreover, one of the few who have impressed their spirit on the world and changed the course of history. It is, on the plainest grounds, worth our while to study him.

And since to study him is to love him, the process of conversion begins here. The Spirit is born in us. We may not "believe in" Christ in the theological sense, but we begin to grow like him. This is far more important. This is why love is the one fundamental in the religion of Christ. No other power is creative: no other can make us in its image. Christ imposed no creed on his disciples. He never asked them if they believed in the Virgin Birth or demanded a recantation of their former beliefs. He knew that those who loved him would gradually grow like him: he knew that in their hearts the Spirit was born.

This is why the gospel of Christ *is* a gospel—a good news. It is amazing to think that all that is required for the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth is that we should love the most lovable person in the earth's history, and yet it is true. Most of us would admit that we should at least be very near to a perfect state of existence, even here on earth, if all of us—rulers, teachers, parents,

priests, and people—were like Christ. Unfortunately, it seems mere arrogance to suppose that we could attain such glory. Yet if it be true at all—and who will deny its truth?—that love grows like what it loves, it must be universally true. It is not a proud claim for any Christian to make, since by his own unlikeness to his Master is glaringly exposed his lack of love: but the claim must be made for it is the gospel. God is love, and therefore love must be held to be creative. In the individual spirit the Holy Spirit works its miracle of rebirth and Christ is born. Is not that "good news" indeed for the dishonest and the mean-spirited, the small-minded, and the cowardly? Is there any other gospel on earth for them?

There are people to whom it seems that goodness is not difficult. Born with a gracious and sunny disposition, unapt for jealousy or sordidness of motive, full of affection, equal to the demands of life on courage, honesty, and honour, we recognise these "once born" when we meet them, and rejoice in them. Nothing will convince us that God does not love and rejoice in them too. Most of us, however, are not like that. We are "troubled with the flapping of unseen wings about the cell" of our soul. We are afraid. We are self-centred. Envy and meanness, cowardice and impurity invade our spirits day by day, and conquer. We may, perhaps, put up a fair show on the whole. We may even be admired for the very virtues we passionately long for and have not. We would be generous and free-spirited and brave, if we could—who would not? But in our hearts is an anguish of fear, and in nothing that we do are we free from the sordid sins that we detest.

No power on earth, it has been said to me, " can make shoddy into wool." I declare with deep conviction that God who created the heavens and the earth can do this also.

Love brought light out of darkness, order out of chaos, and life out of death—animate out of inanimate nature. Love can create courage in the heart of the poltroon, and purity of spirit in the prostitute and the rake. It can give the grace of a free spirit to the mean-hearted, and release the egoist from his galling chains and narrow prison. To know this, not as a magical feat on the part of a celestial conjurer, but as a profound and universal law is, even while still in bondage, to know a lifting of the heart, a " conversion " of the spirit. These things are not only possible—they are inevitable, and all things work together for the good of them that love God.

The miracle is worked every day and continuously. It is the gospel of Christ. It is the operation of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter XVIII.

The Bible

Since love, by universal law, creates in its own image, it is vital that we should love the right God. Christians have looked for him in the Bible and have too much neglected him in his universe. To this mistake they have added the stranger one of trying to worship all the gods that they find in the Old and New Testaments. The Bible (they say) is "inspired" —the work of the Holy Spirit. If, therefore, you do not believe every word of it, you are blaspheming against the Holy Spirit.

I point out that in many places it expressly, and in other places implicitly, contradicts itself. I plead that it is therefore impossible to believe it all. The answer is that, though it seems impossible, I *must* believe even contradictory assertions. This seems to me to blaspheme against the Holy Spirit.

It is certain that my intelligence, such as it is, was given to me by God, and I devoutly wish he had given me more.

I am convinced that reason is of God by the noble appeals to reason made again and again in the Old Testament [1] and reiterated even with pathos by our Lord Christ in the New.[2] I even believe that the light of reason is one aspect of the Spirit of God within me, and associate my understanding with the great

[1] Isaiah i. 18. [2] Luke xviii. 21, etc.

promise of the Comforter.[1] When, therefore, I am invited as a religious duty to believe that (for example) Christ was in the grave three days and three nights, and was also in the grave three days and two nights,[2] my spirit rebels, and I altogether reject a demand so altogether unreasonable. If God expects me to believe things like this, he ought not to have given me a mind at all.

I ask further how I am to believe in and worship one God only, " with all my heart and with all my soul and with all my mind and with all my strength," and yet to believe in all the gods I find in the Bible? It is impossible to worship with the mind and not perceive that there *are* a great many such gods. There is the God who is jealous and the God who is love. There is the one who inflicts his punishments on men, to the third and fourth generation of them that hate him, and the God of Ezekiel who says: " The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son."[3] There is the God who deliberately inflicts monstrous punishments upon those who offend him, and the God who makes his sun to shine upon the evil and the good and sends his rain upon the just and the unjust. It is unnecessary to enlarge upon all this: it is notorious. Our senseless idea of the work of the Holy Spirit in Holy Scripture has reduced us to this senseless and distracting worship of half a dozen gods, and our reiterated declaration that he is one God, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, is mere verbiage.

[1] John xiv. 16, 17, and xvi. 13.
Cf. Matthew xii. 40 and narratives of the Crucifixion and Resurrection.
[2] Ezekiel xviii. 20.

I should indeed save my readers from a discussion of the meaning of inspiration as applied to the Bible, which must appear to many of them a very slaying of the slain, but that I write for unlearned people, and have found the idea that Christians do, and moreover should, believe in a theory that the reason utterly rejects has received fresh impetus apparently from the war. It is not dead—I wish it were.

When Protestantism began, and men rejected the authority of the Church, they substituted for it the authority of the Bible.[1] It seems that we must have some infallible authority, and, rejecting the Church which was at least alive and able, if unwilling, to go forward, we put blind and superstitious faith in the Bible. The same need gives rise to the same superstition now. The cataclysm of war has shaken orthodox beliefs to their foundations. Men will not endure this shaking: some thing they must have to hold on to. Nothing else offering, they will take to the Bible, and declare that here no mistake is possible and everything is to be believed.

I find that many people who cannot adopt this reason-defying position are in some difficulty when challenged to explain what they mean by calling the Bible "inspired" at all. If the Holy Spirit did not seize upon the scribe or prophet and dictate to him as we do to a shorthand writer, what part had the Holy Spirit in the matter? Do we hold that Isaiah, Jeremiah, or St John were inspired in exactly the same sense, and no more and no less, than Shakespeare or Shelley?

[1] It is only just to say that Luther himself was not to blame for this. In fact he actually speaks of one of the books of the Bible—the Epistle of St James—as "an epistle of straw."

The very form of the question (and it has often been put to me in this form) suggests the difference in our points of view. I should reply that Isaiah was inspired " in the same sense " as Shakespeare or Shelley, but that " no more and no less " raises quite a different question.

What is inspiration but the Spirit of Truth enabling men to see and inspiring them to proclaim truths that others cannot or will not see? It is the Holy Spirit within us which speaks—us, yet not us. When Professor Smithells writes: " The discovery of even a small fragment of scientific truth produces on the discoverer an extraordinary sense of exultation," and goes on to say " Is this not to be explained by his having been the instrument of a revelation? " he is describing—and rightly explaining—a sublime, a majestic experience, which all of us when we forget to be theologians would call " inspired." If such experience of the truth comes to the scientist in his most inspired moments, and to the poet who declares it in immortal verse, these are the prophets of God at that hour, even if at others they lose their inspiration and fall back upon half-truths or silence. Let us then say boldly that this proclamation of the truth *is* inspiration, and base our belief in the inspiration of the Bible on our recognition of the fact that its writers were in this sense inspired. Is this not the real sense of inspiration? Or are we to suppose that the Holy Spirit makes no more of us than stenographers?

It is the old question, the old difficulty, found on closer examination to be largely a question of words. As there is no *final* cleavage between divinity and humanity, because God is everywhere and in us all,

so there is no *final* cleavage between the inspiration of Isaiah and the inspiration of Shelley. There are degrees of difference and no more.

The Bible itself makes this clear for, within its own pages, are differences of inspiration. It is futile to claim equal inspiration for the first chapter of Isaiah or the sixth of Micah (to take instances at random), and for the second chapter of 2 Kings. Here they are :—

"Wherewith shall I come before the Lord and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath showed thee, O man, what is good, and what doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God?" [1]

Here is a prophet! Now listen to the writer of 2 Kings :—

"He went up from thence up to Beth-el: and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city and mocked him and said unto him, go up, thou bald-head; go up, thou bald-head. And he looked behind him and saw them and cursed them in the name of the Lord. And there came forth two she-bears out of the wood and tare forty and two children of them." [2]

Is this inspired? Inspired by whom or by what? Which view of God is nearer the truth—this or Micah's? And is the work of the Holy Spirit not the proclaiming of truth?

No verbal inspirationist in the world but makes his own choice from the inspired text. The Psalms

[1] Micah vi. 6-8. [2] 2 Kings ii. 23, 24.

are read a thousand times for once that the Book of Judges is read—the Sermon on the Mount for one reading of the more vindictive passages in the Book of Revelation. Indeed, one has only to observe the fatuity of a theology which, while demanding belief in the deity of Jesus Christ, sets his words as recorded by the Evangelists at the same value as those of any other writer in the Bible, to see how impossible it is to hold it honestly. I believe the Bible reaches a higher level of inspiration than any other collection of books in the world, and I believe that it reaches that level more consistently than any other; but I cannot consent to believe that the words of the writer of Ecclesiastes—"Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself?"[1]—are as valid for the Christian as Christ's "Be ye perfect even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

All truth is one and all truth is of God. To see and to proclaim the highest truth—this is inspiration.

The quarrel about "inspiration" and "verbal inspiration" has led, however, to a misunderstanding of the nature of truth itself. To say that the Bible is not equally inspired throughout and that, for example, the first chapter of Genesis is nobler than the second is, in the minds of many, to say that the second is "not true." Still more is it an indictment of the truth of either chapter to say that neither of them is scientifically nor historically accurate. If it be not accurate, how can it be true?

It is impossible to believe that such folly could still be seriously discussed in connection with any other writing in the world, and yet I know from

[1] Ecclesiastes vii. 16

experience that it is seriously discussed in connection with the Bible, and seriously troubles many Christian people. What then is meant by truth? Is it "true" to say of God that he "dwelleth in the light of setting suns," and then to argue that we must now build our churches looking west instead of east? Is Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" "true"? And if so, is it not rash to bind it up in one volume (as is sometimes done) with his "Siege of Mansoul," which, obviously, cannot also be true? If the life of man is a pilgrimage from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City, it cannot also be a siege! But it is—both a pilgrimage *and* a siege; and God does dwell in the light of setting suns, as all but the blind can see if they look.

"Do you believe in evolution?" I have been asked, and on answering "yes"—"but how can you reconcile the theory of evolution with the first chapter of Genesis?" To which I reply that if my questioner will reconcile the first chapter of Genesis with the second chapter of Genesis I will readily undertake to reconcile both of them with the theory of evolution. Up to the present, however, it has not been done, nor can it be done if the reader insists on regarding poetry as science or folklore as history. But there is a sense in which poetry is more "true" than science and folklore than history.

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth . . . and God said, Let there be light and there was light, and God saw the light that it was good . . . and the evening and the morning were the first day . . . and God said, Let us make man in our image . . . so God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male

and female created he them . . . and God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day." If that is not both glorious and true I for one can recognise neither truth nor glory. That is the first chapter of Genesis. The second is not poetry so much as folklore. It is on a lower level, but it is picturesque and has its inspired moments. "The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." Will you easily better that?

The story of the Garden of Eden is folklore. Then, says the student of history, it is not true? It is more profoundly true than history. History is a more or less accurate account of events, and only the careful historian knows how much more often it is less than more. Folklore is crystallised human experience. How often have men sold their souls to the devil for the perilous gift of knowledge! How death-bringing has their use of it often been![1] Knowledge is power, and power is used to destroy as well as to create. No wonder men have feared it! No wonder they distrust their own right to it! No wonder they are as terrified as attracted and attracted as terrified! Adam in the Garden of Eden, Faust in his laboratory, are the embodiment in the minds of men of this fear and this desire. Is the story of man's longing for knowledge, and his death-dealing use of it, untrue or out-of-date? Let those who know something of the marvels of modern science and the horrors of modern war reply! It is indeed not God

[1] "God hath said, ye shall not eat of it" (the Tree of Knowledge) "neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die."—Genesis iii. 3.

who brings death upon us, but we who bring it upon ourselves. Let us read the story of the Garden of Eden again, and remember that as it is natural for man to blame woman for his follies, so it is natural for both to blame God.

The deplorable part is that by mistaking accuracy for truth and poetry for history we have nearly succeeded in persuading people that the Bible is a dull book. Most people know, for example, of the Book of Jonah that it contains a silly story about a fish and seek to know no more. If they do seek, they find themselves involved in an argument of almost unbelievable futility as to whether the fish was a whale (but a whale is not a fish), and whether whales' throats are so constructed as to make it possible for them to swallow anything so large as a prophet. I do not know whether, if it is decided that the fish was a whale, Christian natural history will in future be called upon to maintain that whales are fish, but I expect so. After all, if geologists have to believe that the world was made in six days, why should the naturalist escape? Is he a better man than the geologist?

The astronomer cannot be let off either. There is that dramatic story of Joshua who bade the sun stand still. I am always reminded in reading it of the story of Childe Roland in Browning's poem. The hero suddenly found himself in the appointed place of doom and marvelled that he had not recognised it before—

> "Not see? Because of night perhaps?—Why, day
> Came back again for that!"

In after years I suppose the Browning Society will

claim that Browning did not hold our views of astronomy, since he clearly stated that the sun "came back" on purpose to see the end of Childe Roland, just as it "stood still" for the destruction of the Amorites.

This is nonsense. My quarrel with the verbal inspirationists is precisely that they take the noblest truths and make them into nonsense. Who would believe from their account of it that the Book of Jonah was one of the noblest in the Bible, and almost the only one with a sense of humour?

To those who are seriously perplexed by this distinction between "truth" and "accuracy," let me quote a phrase so poetic and so true that neither the verbal inspirationist nor the scientist has ventured to distort or to attack it; though most certainly it is not scientifically correct.

"The stars in their courses fought against Sisera." What can this mean? No astronomer will admit the possibility of the stars deviating by a hair's-breadth from their appointed courses because Sisera was fighting the Israelites on earth. They were not there at the time, it is true, nor were any telescopes trained upon the stars that night; but they will declare that all was as usual, and we shall believe them.

Yet this great phrase has come down to us and owes its immortal beauty to its imperishable truth. The poet knew that there is an order in the universe, whose outraged majesty must and will vindicate itself. This truth has been expressed in the sublime tragedies of the greatest Greek poetry. It is reiterated by the science of to-day. The sense of doom on the one hand and of mastery on the other alike bear witness to it.

" Who sets his feet on law's firm track
The universe is at his back."

" Whatsoever a man sows that shall he also reap." When the strong are cruel and the successful abuse their strength, when the weak are violated and the innocent destroyed, there seems no remedy and no help : but the moral order of the universe, outraged, will vindicate itself at last. No man can fight against God. All things will be found to be against him.

Is that true? It is truth itself, proclaimed in prophetic language. The stars in their courses fought against Sisera. The astronomer knows it.[1] Only the verbal inspirationist does not.

His stupidity pursues us into the most sacred places, and even the gospels are deprived of their significance. The gospels, we all know, are in four versions, " according to " Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. If we were permitted as children to realise the importance of that " according to," with what enhanced intelligence and interest we should approach them !

I was grown up and more than grown up before I learned that each was written for a different public, with, therefore, a different purpose. I had only been taught of one difference in value between one gospel and another—namely, that St John's was " the greatest." Even this must seem to the verbal inspirationist a deplorable lapse from orthodoxy, since to him the verses—" Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Aram "—are of equal inspira-

[1] " The undevout astronomer is mad." —Kepler.

tion with the first sentences of St John. I could wish that for once I had been left to think so myself, if it could have saved me from this misleading information about the Fourth Gospel. For when, like many others who have lost faith in the Christ of orthodox Christianity and sought to recover him for themselves, I turned to the New Testament again, I naturally returned to this " greatest " Evangel. No one warned me that the greatest is not always the most lovable, or that to love Christ is better than to have an orthodox view of his divinity. No one informed me that the author of the Fourth Gospel, writing somewhere about A.D. 90, took it for granted that his readers were familiar with at least some of the contents of the other gospels. I read St John and was repelled.

Men knew the human Christ before they realised or could realise his divinity. They loved him before they began to understand his greatness. We should read St Luke before we read St John—St Luke whose Christ has conquered the world.

To know that St Mark's Gospel was written first, that St Matthew's was the work of a Jew writing for Jews, and St Luke's of a Gentile for Gentiles : these are simple matters and do not demand very profound learning. Yet what a flood of light they throw on this (to us Christians) most vital part of the Bible ! Armed with this information alone, most of us could with our unaided intelligence make out something comprehensible.

We should begin to realise that minor discrepancies were not of vital importance, since every man tells his tale in his own way, and every man's way is different from the next man's. We should realise

also that, not only a man's own temperament and character but his purpose in writing at all, has an influence over what he writes.

If St Matthew wrote for Jews it was because he wished to convince them that Jesus was the Messiah prophesied to them in their own Bible, the Old Testament. Those exasperating little asides—" This said he that the scriptures might be fulfilled "—would cease to be exasperating. We should realise that our Lord was not playing a part carefully rehearsed because, unless he did and spoke so, " how should the scriptures be fulfilled that thus it must be? "[1] We should be relieved from the same difficulty arising in a different way in St John.

To take one instance only of the sort of difficulty I mean. Nothing was to me more repugnant than the impression conveyed in the Fourth Gospel that Jesus worked miracles as a kind of advertisement. I afterwards realised that, according to the other gospels, Jesus was so reluctant to do any such thing that he withdrew sometimes from place to place, shrank from the fame that attended his mighty works, and reproached his followers with their mistaken idea of the importance of miracles and base love of loaves and fishes. It seemed that he would even have refused to work miracles but that his deep compassion for human suffering constrained him. When asked by Herod to do something startling, he refused.

Yet, according to St John, all Christ's mighty works were " signs," and the idea of calculated effect is suggested by the use of this word and by the evangelist's preoccupation with his thesis. The

[1] Matthew xxvi. 54.

most jarring note in the whole Bible to me is in the eleventh chapter of this gospel, where it is written that Jesus gave thanks to God in these words: "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me, and I know that thou hearest me always: but because of the multitude which stand round I said it, that they may believe that thou didst send me."[1] If use has made it possible for the mind to pass lightly over these words in silence without shock, I defy any one to read them aloud in their context and not find them almost intolerable. The idea that Jesus could pray to God in order to create an effect on his hearers is by itself enough to account for the repulsion that many people feel for the Christ of St John. It is, of course, intensified by sayings and denunciations which strike the imagination painfully, though no other is quite so painful as this one.

Is it necessary for us to be left to read the gospels in this unintelligent way? So little help would make so great a difference! If we knew that the Fourth Gospel was not intended for a history or a biography, but was rather a theological interpretation of historical facts, we should enter into the spirit of it with some kind of intelligence. We are perfectly capable of understanding that a man who is proving a point will and must handle his material in quite a different way from the historian pure and simple (if such historian there be) and that he has a perfect right to do so. The fact that he gives us his own interpretation of the events recorded does not prove his interpretation to be wrong! St John was seeking both to establish and expound his doctrine of the divinity of Christ, just as St Matthew sought to

[1] John xi. 41 and 42.

establish the Messiahship of Jesus. He makes no secret of it. And as certain sayings and facts which accorded with Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament are noted by St Matthew as evidence of his claim, so the mighty works of Jesus are cited by John as " signs " of the divinity of Christ.

When we know this, we do not immediately rush to the opposite conclusion that Jesus was not the Messiah nor Christ divine ; but we do understand and put into their right places the allusions and comments of the evangelists. We cease to feel that our Lord spoke or acted a part " that the Scriptures might be fulfilled," nor do we believe that he said that a man had been born blind in order to manifest the glory of God. We see the miracle of healing and note that this did indeed manifest God's glory ; we understand the insistence of the evangelist on the greatness of the sign.

When we set to work in this spirit and with this small amount of knowledge, the gospels become to us as full of human interest as of divine inspiration. The Christ they reveal becomes absorbingly real, and problems we are still incompetent to solve lose their terror. We can believe in a solution, and sometimes even guess at its nature, when the futile efforts to think every statement equally true and equally inspired left our minds stupefied into acquiescence or actively rebellious. Once more we find it safer as well as more glorious to respond sincerely and courageously to the amazing condescension of God —" Come now, let us reason together."

We cease, too—or shall soon cease, I trust—to be guilty of the paradox of making any other teaching equal in authority to that of Christ. It is the very

irony of things that the more " orthodox " a Christian is, the more he insists on the equal authority of Moses, Ezekiel, the cynical author of Ecclesiastes, or St Paul, with Christ. The very fact that Christianity is not Judaism nor the Old Testament the New is apparently forgotten. In the Church of England the Ten Commandments are recited as though Christ had never said " A new commandment I give unto you," and the idea of superseding the Ten Commandments is still regarded as an absurdity. People who want us to observe the Sunday call themselves Sabbatarians, and for authority for their astonishing demands refer critics to the Fourth Commandment, in apparently complete unconsciousness that they break it into splinters every Saturday in the year. That there is nothing said anywhere in the Bible about observing Sunday as a day of rest is a fact that they have never discovered and never will, because they do not choose to. In consequence, the very cogent case which can be made out for the keeping of one day in seven as a day of spiritual and physical refreshment and rest is never made out at all.

I seize an instance almost at random of the astonishing use made by Christian teachers and preachers of the Bible because, in spite of the surprise that will be felt by many of my readers, these imbecilities exist, and are both a trouble to Christians and a stumbling-block to non-Christians. Yet very little is said about them from pulpits or in Sunday-schools. Respect for ignorance and stupidity is carried to a point which reduces sermons and lessons to vagueness. Most preachers know the truth of all I have said, and will impatiently ask why I labour a point so obvious. I do so because if they know they have

not told, and the result is a recrudescence in our own time of the most ignorant statements and beliefs about the Bible.

I protest against the idea that the truth is too good for the average congregation, or is above their heads, or likely to destroy their faith. I do not plead that, if this is true of the old or the unlearned, it is a mistake to sacrifice the younger or the more learned to their weakness : I rather claim boldly that since the old also are immortal spirits, no less than the young, and the unlearned as likely to be intellectually honest as the learned, the truth is not too good for any of us. If it destroys any man's faith to hear the truth, his faith must have been put in something not true. Can a greater service be done to any of us than to have that destroyed which is false ? I claim that this is so, even if the first result—or the last—is a deep sense of loss. Every one who has cherished a delusion feels a sense of loss when the delusion is destroyed. Which of us is so wise as not to have passed through that process ? But every sincere spirit prefers the loss to the lie. It is a mistake to think that the old are sure to love error or the ignorant to resent knowledge. It is contemptuous to act on this idea. Old people and unlearned people are very capable of rejoicing in the beauty of truth, even when it is to them a new truth. The oldest may be relieved to learn that God did not send two bears out of a wood to devour forty-two children: the most ignorant to hear that their salvation does not depend on their ability to believe truths which contradict one another.

Our Lord said we should not cast pearls before swine and refused to work a miracle for Herod or

to deliver a sermon to Pontius Pilate His silence when words had ceased to convey any meaning to judges—whether High Priest or Roman Governor—is as comprehensive and perfect an illustration of his own meaning as one could wish to have. But Jesus did not readily think men were swine or refuse to them the pearls of his truth. To a woman of evil character and alien race he gave one of the noblest of religious truths.[1] To publicans and harlots he preached the Gospel. The fact that people might be shocked or hurt did not deter him, and he kept no contemptuous silence before the weaker brother. St Paul, to whom most men and all women appeared to be very weak brothers indeed, was careful where Christ was bold. Such care is not respectful—it is contemptuous. It assumes that people are incapable of seeing the truth the speaker sees, and must therefore be left to wallow in their ignorance. St Paul's vaunted respect for all manner of foolish ideas is nothing else but a deeply felt conviction of the hopelessness of presenting really great ideas to certain people, or of revealing to them the greatness of the God in whom the Apostle himself believed. That God did not care whether men ate meat, sacrificed to idols or not, St Paul knew well. He would rather leave foolish people to think he did, than hurt their feelings by presenting to them a nobler God than this. Christ did not so. When the Pharisees, believing that God cared whether men plucked ears of corn on the Sabbath day or not, asked him to rebuke his disciples for doing so, he replied as few Christians have had the moral courage to do. He did not say to his disciples (as we constantly say to our-

[1] John iv. 24.

selves and one another) that this was a very small point, on which it would be gracious and expedient to give way. He did not remind them that, while they of course knew better, the Pharisees were sincerely religious people whose feelings might easily be hurt and whose scruples should be respected. He did not, in a word, leave it to be supposed that God was a petty tyrant capable of interest in such minutiæ of ecclesiasticism as absorbed the attention of the Pharisees. On the contrary, he let his disciples continue plucking the corn and risked—it might be said deliberately challenged—the wrath of the "orthodox."

It is in accord with this teaching that I claim the truth for all of us, even if it hurts our feelings and even if it makes us angry. It is disastrous to us to be allowed to think that God is a small-minded pedant: it is fatal to think he will forgive a falsity or—more terrible still—himself be afraid of the truth. "The Lord has no need of thy lies," was the abrupt reproof of a preacher to one who was arguing with him about the advisability of economy in telling the truth.

If we know that the Bible is a Word of God (Jesus was the Word made flesh: the visible universe another Word) we need neither be afraid to know the whole truth about it nor afraid to let others know it too. "Defend the Bible?" Dr Parker is reported to have said: "I should as soon think of defending a lion! Let it loose—it will defend itself."

Chapter XIX.

The Church

The most articulate theorists about the Church are of two opinions : one school believes that our Lord came to found a Church, and that the work of redemption must be done through that Church alone ; the other that he never founded or thought of founding any Church, and that organised Christianity has been a mere perversion or caricature of Christianity as Christ meant it to be. Theorists of the first school believe that through the Church alone can any good thing be done ; the second that its existence has been an unmitigated misfortune. Articulate as these two bodies of theorists are, I believe that the great majority of us believe neither of them.

The belief that Christ created an organised Church, in the sense that we now understand the word, is difficult to maintain without resort to the desperate expedient of guessing how he spent the forty days between the Resurrection and the Ascension. When we are asked to believe that the Church, with bishops, priests, Apostolical Succession and sacraments, was exactly and completely organised by Jesus in that time, and that what the Church now teaches on these and many other subjects was imparted to it then, we cannot help marvelling at the extraordinary difference which would appear to exist between our Lord

before and after the Resurrection. The differences which I have noticed already—differences which appear to have made it difficult for his followers to realise at first with whom they were speaking—were differences which did not affect his spirit. Indeed it was by his spirit that he was recognised in the end. Some characteristic word or act revealed him, and they knew that it was the Lord. But this ecclesiastical theory of the organising of the Church changes him out of all recognition. The spiritual genius becomes the organiser—the proclaimer of principles, the framer of rules. A fellowship of friends becomes in a few days or weeks a highly elaborate organisation such as, in ordinary circumstances, one would expect successive generations to create. And for all this we have hardly any evidence except the existence of such a society at a very much later date. The use of such words as apostle, bishop, priest and deacon, widow and virgin, is assumed to imply all that, centuries later, they were found to mean, and the extreme improbability of such an elaborate organisation having come into existence except in response to the growing needs of Christian people is passed over by mysterious references to the still more mysterious events of "the forty days."

The result of this curious reasoning in a vacuum is that many developments which might reasonably have been expected from historical reasons to take place are regarded as having been divinely ordained by the express command of Christ himself, and any attempt to change or to develop further is met with the surprising objection that Christ himself laid down these rules and they can, therefore, never be changed. If it is urged that, in fact, they have

changed, some change is admitted, and defended as permissible under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; but none of these changes could alter what Christ himself laid down during "the forty days" and, in the case of the Church of England, none can now be made at all, as the Holy Spirit can only operate through a whole and undivided Church—which does not now exist. Œcumenical Councils alone could issue new orders, and no such Council can now be held for Christendom is divided into East and West.

It appears that nothing further can be done. As, in the case of the Bible, the loss of all the original manuscripts without a single exception makes it impossible for us ever to know which of the existing texts (if any) is the verbally inspired one, and so it seems we are deprived of the benefit of verbal inspiration altogether; so, with the Church, the division into East and West has obstructed the work of the Holy Spirit and we have now no more to hope, at least until the Catholic Church is visibly and organically one again.

It is only human in such circumstances for ecclesiastics to decide rather arbitrarily what is and what is not divinely ordained and therefore insusceptible of change. I observe, for example, that if Christ consecrated bishops or ordained priests at all, he did so not only from one sex only, but from one class and one nation. His chosen apostles were all working-class people; all Jews; all men. It has been decided that bishops and priests need not be Jews and had positively better not be working-class people;[1] but

[1] This at least has been the attitude of the Church of England for many generations.

they are still all men, and any proposal to admit women is met with a shocked reference to the fact that Christ ordained no women. As for the character of the episcopate and the priesthood, Apostolical Succession and the like, these were all decided during the forty days, and as there is no evidence of this, no one can call the evidence into question. The Sacrament of Baptism may be in case of necessity administered by any one ; the Sacrament of the Holy Communion only by a priest ordained by a bishop consecrated by Apostolical Succession. There are other sacraments which stand in some dispute as to whether they are necessary or not. But all this we must decide on evidence which does not exist, unless we are to hold that the existence of these orders and sacraments in themselves proves their divine origin, since they belong to the Church and the Church was divinely instituted. If, however, facts in themselves are to be considered as evidence, we have the astonishing but undeniable fact that there are men and women outside any Church and unsustained by any Sacrament, whose lives are lives of convincing sanctity.

This leads us to consider the opposing point of view. It is quite usual nowadays to hear men discussing the decay of Christianity and attributing it chiefly or wholly to the existence of organised Churches. These, it is urged, have always distorted the teaching of Christ and exploited his personality for their own purposes. They have created vested interests, bound themselves up with discredited beliefs, and done all this because they are organisations, and organisations are bound to behave in this way. Christ, accordingly, must be believed to have

created no organisation or Church and is known to have been at war with the Church of his own day. We ourselves would be better Christians if we followed his example in this and, indeed, most of the people inside the Church are worse—more narrow-minded, hypocritical, and uncharitable—than the people outside.

If I find myself as unable to agree with this presentation of the case as with the other, I hope it is not out of perversity. Indeed I believe that I am only one of a great number who also reject both extreme views, but are not, or not often, articulate about their own.

We believe that Christ founded a fellowship. Personally, it seems to me quite inevitable that he should have done so. How could he help it? With a personality like his, and a work like his to do, it was inevitable that people should come about him, drawn by the magnetism of his appeal: inevitable that some should not only be drawn to but wish to stay with him. This, in fact, is exactly what did happen. The scattered and not always consistent accounts of the coming of the disciples to Christ makes this at least clear. Some he called individually: some sought him out: some he rejected.

We are not to suppose that the maniac whom Christ healed and sent home was not sincere in his desire to remain with his Healer; nor that Lazarus whom Christ so greatly loved would not have been true to him had he been called to that fellowship. Neither of them was called: neither had a vocation, we must suppose. Others were called and hesitated or refused. The rich young man could not make the

necessary sacrifice. Another was reluctant to leave his aged father.

Gradually, however, the little band of active helpers was formed. There is doubt as to who they were : lists of names do not agree. Twelve were probably more closely associated with Christ's work than the rest, yet seventy were sent out to preach the Gospel. Even among the twelve, three were called upon for special services—Peter, James, and John. Any one can see how it happened. Any one can see that it must have happened. But is this a Church ? Is this an organisation ?

Certainly it is, and it is exactly the organisation that was then and there imperatively needed. This is how organisations are formed. They are created—in the first stages it should rather be said they *grow*—out of the needs of persons and the work done by persons. Jesus needed friends and his friends needed him. He began to need workers also : some of his friends were suited for the work and others not. The ones who were so suited formed a band of ministers, and here is the Church. In the future lay its vast development, its increasing elaboration, its orders and sacraments. These things also arose out of its needs.

I feel bound to point out to the critics of organised Christianity that if our Lord did not foresee all this, he showed a singular ignorance of human nature—an ignorance quite unbelievable in one so supremely and profoundly wise. I do, indeed, meet people who believe that no organisation is necessary and that, since it is unnecessary, it is wrong. These are people with whom it is impossible to work, for they refuse to recognise the limitations of our common human

nature. We live in time and space and are subject to these, and it is really impossible to live at all without recognising this fact. Few people of creative genius really like organisations, for they are always seeking to transcend recognised limitations and to lift all our powers on to a higher and more spacious plane. They recognise the danger of accepting the limitations of the present as permanent and by this means stifling the adventurous spirit by which humanity goes forward. They know, too, the strength of vested interests and shun the dead weight of a rigid past.

Vested interests are not only material; they can be, and often are, spiritual also. The man who has taught some opinion for years has a vested interest in its continuing to be held orthodox: the prophet who prophesies disaster an interest in the fulfilment of his prophecy. Jonah was not the only prophet to resent the merciful attitude of Jehovah to those whose penitence made his warnings void!

There are, in fact, a thousand objections to the organising of a Church. But there is one consideration which overrules them all—it is that organisation is necessary.

Christ chose the most suitable persons from those who came to him; gave them positions and work of varying importance; called the twelve to remain with him; "appointed" or "commissioned" seventy to go out to preach. The process continued after the Resurrection and Ascension and was bound to continue. At intervals the organisation grows too elaborate and rigid, and prophetic spirits in rebellion seek to destroy or escape it. In vain. Organisation of some kind cannot be avoided.

The Society of Friends is a typical example of this kind of rebellion. Desiring to be led always and only by the Holy Spirit, they tried to avoid all the elaborate government, organisation, and ritual of the Catholic Church. They called themselves a "Society," rejecting the name of Church altogether. They permitted no priesthood or professional ministry. They substituted silence for sacrament and ritual. They called Sunday "First Day."

What difference does it make? The Society is a Church with a different name. First Day is no less Sunday. For priest and ministers elders are provided, and for their meetings of worship a building must be erected and a time appointed. I do not know if all Quaker meetings practise the same ritual, but, among those I have attended, it is the custom, rigidly adhered to, that when one prays aloud he rises to his feet and the rest fall upon their knees. The meeting ends with the hour, and the elders shake each other's hands before breaking up. The order or ritual is as rigidly observed as the order of the mass in a Roman Catholic cathedral. I can truly say that I should feel—and be—much more conspicuous if I failed to observe it in a Quaker meeting-house than if I wandered at my own pleasure about a Roman Catholic church while mass was being celebrated.

The sacerdotal "priest" is ordained because he is believed by the competent authority to be called to the ministry. The "elder" of the Society of Friends is called to his post because he is recognised as a man of exceptional spiritual power. The method is different: the principle is the same. If I speak of

Quakers and Roman Catholics it is only because in them we recognise the extremes. What is true of them is true of us all. Reduce organisation to a minimum—dispense with a professional ministry—refuse to call yourselves a Church—all is vain. The Church, the ministry, the organisation, all are needed and all reappear. What they gain in simplicity they lose in elasticity. To many of us the Society of Friends seems far more rigid than the Catholic Church.

It is impossible to believe that our Lord did not know what would happen. His emphasis on the importance of the Spirit in all things, not least but rather most in ecclesiastical matters, was insistent, but he never suggested that it was possible to do without organisation at all. Some body (society or organisation) the Spirit must have: we call it a Church or The Church. Whatever it be called it will still be a necessity

Christianity is a social religion. It is not, as so many people have said it was and wished it might be, a "purely personal affair." Buddhism, the most spiritual of all religions outside Christianity, turns the gaze of the disciple inwards. It is a religion of escape. Not so with Christianity. The religion of Christ holds the balance equally and the very consecration of the believer is to be for the sake of others.[1] Nothing can be done without that personal consecration: everything comes from within: the Kingdom of Heaven is within us, and it is the immanent Spirit of God which directs and upholds all our efforts. But still the Gospel of Christ is of the Kingdom. It is for others that we serve. It is the world itself that

[1] "For their sakes I sanctify myself."—John xvii. 19.

must be redeemed and we are not allowed to give it up as hopeless. God made it, and still it is very good.

The Church is a recognition of this social teaching. It affirms at once our inability and our refusal to live alone. It declares that we cannot be saved or damned to ourselves. The saying which fills many with horror—and has indeed been made a horror by the way in which it has been used—" outside the Church is no salvation "—is only horrible when literally interpreted. It is used as though we perfectly knew who is and who is not of the Church—a thing we cannot know and must leave to God. Some, as Christ himself reminded us, are of the flock though they are not of the fold—they belong to him though they are not within one building or organisation. In essence, however, this dread saying is true: no man lives or dies to himself alone. No man can love God without loving his neighbour. No man is religious whose religion is a purely personal matter. Salvation in the last resort depends not on our spiritual discipline or our orthodox belief, but on our service to our fellow-men.[1]

This is so surprising to the orthodox that they have never really believed it. We still argue about justification by faith and justification by works, as though Christ had never pronounced the parable of the sheep and the goats. The goats are still surprised to find themselves goats: the sheep astounded to be sheep.

The Church herself—irony of ironies!—forgets the purpose and meaning of her own existence and

[1] Matthew xxv. 31-46.

holds the acceptance of a creed more necessary to orthodoxy than the feeding of the hungry or the visiting of the sick.

Yet it must have been the sense of fellowship and the need of it that first drew close the bonds of union among Christians and created a Church. The spirit of fellowship does not come by looking for it, or by passing resolutions that in future we really must have it. It comes, without observation, because some men and women find themselves in agreement about an ideal which sets the world against them.

The soldiers had fellowship in the trenches during the war. Conscientious objectors had fellowship in prison. When there is a great adventure and great odds there is fellowship—there is a Church.

The followers of Christ had it in that upper room where, bereft of their Lord, they met with closed doors for fear of the Jews. No wonder the Holy Spirit descended upon them!

They " had all things in common." When we are in a common danger for a common cause, how can we call anything our own? I dare swear that if any one shall set out to-day to be a Christian he will find himself holding things in common with those who try to do the like.

When the fervour of the spirit cools, the organisation becomes rigid and a burden. What is then needed is not an attempt to be rid of organisation altogether, but a renewal of the Spirit which shall dominate the organisation, and make it living again, and so able to change. Living, it will be adaptable to the needs of the Spirit and obedient to its commands. We waste our strength in pretending to ourselves that it is organisation itself that is

wrong. Those who have, in passionate rebellion, broken away from the Church have ended either in dissipating their strength altogether or in founding a new Church. Even the Quakers have not escaped this fate.

It is true that, at certain stages, men seem to be called upon to choose between holding to a Church they can no longer believe in or going out into the wilderness. This is a terrible alternative. It is true that if the only choice that remains to us is between isolation and dishonesty, isolation must be our choice. Let us never forget that the loss is irreparable.

An ancient Church unites us not only with our fellow-men of to-day, but with those who have gone before. It is more truly democratic, however hierarchical its organisation, than the modern sect, for it assumes the presence of the Holy Spirit in us all and not only in us of the twentieth century. It is in itself a recognition of the presence of God with us throughout the ages. That Presence demands indeed that we should still progress; it was to *lead* us into the truth that the Holy Spirit was promised: but the experience of the past is of profound value to us to-day, and when its exponents rise to prophetic heights it can no more be out of date than Isaiah or the Psalms.

To break away from the Church is to lose something of that deep-rooted unity which lies in historic growth. Some of the finest spirits have become ineffective in the world because they wanted to shatter the past with all its mistakes, and to begin anew. It is impossible to begin so, and to try is to be frustrated. We lose more than we gain. A Church is like a ritual—it cannot be invented or put together.

It seems so simple to some people, impatient of the defects in all organisations, in all forms of worship, in all expressions of thought, to make something superior to them all by choosing out what is good and rejecting what is bad from each. The result is the manufactured as against the living thing. Eclectic religions have to me a painful sense of artificiality. They are "made up" when they should have grown. A historic religion has its difficulties, but it is a religion: the manufactured article is not. It refuses to come alive. It is like the carefully selected ritual which, instead of growing up in response to the needs and beliefs of worshippers, has been put together out of many rituals in the hope of getting the best and avoiding all defects. It seems such a good plan: the result is desolating. We are driven back to the actual facts and to ancient history.

Out of the necessity for organisation arose the different orders and liturgies of the Christian Church. Its work increased. For what one could do at first several were needed. The work they had to do must therefore be divided. It was divided according to the capability of the worker. The apostles felt that it was a waste of their time to serve tables. Deacons were appointed. No doubt if a server of tables were found to possess great spiritual gifts he would by common consent and in course of time be released for service of a more definitely spiritual kind.

It will be said that this happens in every organisation and that it is useless to labour the point. The work is sorted to the men and the men to the work. But this is precisely what we are not allowed by a certain school of thought to believe about the Church. We are expected to accept the whole

organisation, or nearly the whole of it, as divinely instituted, and therefore unchangeable. Nothing could be more improbable. Not in forty days but by degrees, different classifications or orders appeared in the Church according to the Church's needs. Why this perfectly natural and inevitable process in the organisation of the Church should be made into a fetish and assumed to be of supernatural origin it is difficult to understand. Personally, I accept it because I see it is bound to happen and always does happen. Calling bishops elders or priests presbyters makes no difference to the fact that in a great organisation there are varieties of work, some more, some less exalted, and that the good sense of the organisers and of the whole community will aim at calling the finest spirits to the finest work.

These finer spirits, just because they are finer, represent the Church more truly than the rest: but they are not the Church. They represent it when representative action or words are called for, but Christ gave the Great Commission to the whole Church, apostles and laity, men and women.[1] It seems impossible to doubt this. And at Pentecost they were *all* filled with the Holy Ghost.

[1] See *Report of the Lambeth Conference*: Commission on the Position of Women in the Church, 1920, p. 96:—"With Bishop Westcott and Dr Hort we venture to think that the great commission was given to those who were representatives of the whole Church; and among those representatives we have every reason to think that women had a place. Again we are led to conclude that the evangelistic charge (Matthew xxviii. 16-20) was delivered to a company which included women. The words of the evangelist are: 'But the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into the mountain as Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him they worshipped him; *οἱ δὲ ἐδίστασαν*.' The natural meaning of the last words is 'but others doubted.' Others, then, we infer, besides the eleven were present; and if others, then we may with great probability say that women were among them. This probability is immensely increased if we identify, as there is strong reason for identifying, this appearance of the

When special work had to be allotted to special workers and the different "orders" arose, it was and still is held that the Church recognises the vocation of these special ones to their work and authorises the doing of that work, but does not confer the vocation. In the ordination services of the Anglican Prayer-Book, the candidate is not called to the ministry: he is asked whether he believes himself to be so called by the Holy Spirit. The bishop does not, in ordaining a priest or deacon, bestow on him a vocation, but recognises it and authorises the ordinand to exercise his function. It seems hardly possible for any great organisation to proceed otherwise. Forms differ, but the fact that men have different gifts and are not always able to judge their own capacity remains. In any Church orders, whatever called, will appear. It is better that those who have certain spiritual gifts should be set apart for their exercise by authority.

If these things arise out of the conditions of our human nature, it seems to me unnecessary to suppose that they have any other origin. Indeed to ascribe the development and organisation of the Church to our common human needs, powers, and aspirations, is to ascribe it to a source noble and sacred enough. Whoever accepts with humble loyalty the nature of things as they are, will be willing to accept the necessity of order and organisation even while he rejects the idea that any order or organisa-

risen Lord with that of which St Paul tells us (1 Corinthians xv. 6), the appearance to above five hundred brethren at once. Demonstration in these, as in so many other important matters, is beyond our reach. But at least the strong probability is that women were among the recipients of the great commission and of the evangelistic charge, as afterwards they were of the gift of Pentecost."

tion is perfect and in no need of development or change.

That orders arise out of the Church itself and are delegated in a representative fashion to those most fit to exercise them is shown in, for example, the recognition of the validity of baptism administered by lay persons. A priest is preferred—it is part of his priestly function—but if no priest is present any one may admit the person to be baptised into the congregation of Christ's Church.[1]

This is a tremendous admission. It involves the priesthood of the laity—a phrase which an extreme sacerdotalism in some parts of the Church has emptied of meaning. The primitive custom of confession in the presence of the congregation was a recognition of the same principle. Such confessions sometimes causing grave scandal, priests were made confessors, as representing the congregation and, in the name of the Church, pronounced absolution. I cannot think that the practice of confession to this day is based on any other principle than all the rest—the needs of Christian people and the ordering of the Church as to how they may best be met.

Confession of sin on repentance is a universal impulse. It is so natural and right that no religious body can ignore it. The penitent form of the Salvation Army and the sacramental confession of the Catholic alike bear witness to its necessity. Whether it is called confession or not, it is needed and it takes place.

[1] If a bishop is present he should baptise; if not a bishop a priest; if not a priest a deacon; if not a deacon a layman; if not a layman a woman. This is according to ecclesiastical law, though common sense might prefer (for example) a medical woman to a burglar. In either case the baptism would be valid.

The reason is that we are *solidaire*—social beings whose lives are so knit together that every sin, however secret and however personal, is committed against the whole community. No man can sin to himself alone. The unuttered thought of evil lowers the spiritual temperature for all and is a sin against all. Whether people recognise this or not, they do unconsciously know it, and when they repent they are impelled to confess the fault and to ask for pardon, not only from God and not only from the person directly injured, but from the community itself, or at least from some person who is, by external authority or spiritual power or both, a representative person. This is why all religious leaders receive confessions, formal or informal. This is why the Church of England has appointed priests, who represent the offended and injured Christian community, to hear confessions and to give absolution.

To me, though I realise the great benefit derived from a wise director, it seems very human and right that any priest ordained by the Church should be able to hear confessions and give absolution. If he is not wise or holy, he is still the representative of the injured community. It is because the sinner has injured that fellowship—not because the fellowship is holy—that he wishes to confess and to be forgiven. The assurance of God's forgiveness through the lips of a human being is a most perfect means of keeping this in mind. We have not only injured the saints but the sinners. If we were to address our confessions to the congregation as at a " testimony meeting " we should still be addressing it to both.

If no priest could be found for those services to which the Church has ordained priests, the authority

would still be found in the Church itself. If every bishop in the world were to be swept off by a pestilence, priests must still be ordained. If a band of Christians were left on a desert island with no priest among them, they would have authority to be married and absolved as well as to be baptised, for they would be in that place the Church. I am convinced that they could celebrate a Holy Communion and still find in it the communion of the body and blood of Christ. The sacramental idea is too human and too true to disappear with the organised method of expressing it.

The priest is still a priest even though the Church may fail to ordain him. Human beings will find him out and he will exercise his compassionate vocation and care for the souls of men even without its august authority. The loss is double: the Church loses his ministry; he loses her blessing, her guidance, and her prayers. There are, however, no means by which we can ensure that no one will ever be mistakenly ordained or mistakenly refused ordination. This is one of the limitations inherent in human life. It is a misfortune, but it only becomes a calamity when the infallibility of the Church is erected into an article of faith and nothing can be changed which has ever been decided. This assumes that perfection is possible on earth and has actually been realised.

Perfection, whether of churches, liturgy, or ritual, is not to be found on earth and, as we are ourselves so very imperfect, doubtless we should neither like nor recognise perfection did we see it.

I am often asked how I can remain a member of the Church of England. I have to admit that I do not know how I could enter it if I were not already

within it, and this seems—not only to unsympathetic but also to sympathetic critics, and to myself—to suggest that I ought now to leave it.

But I believe in the necessity of organisation. I perceive that however earnestly men try to escape it they cannot. It is in the nature of things, so long as we live in time and space. The loosest bond of fellowship demands a place of meeting and a time, some one to call the believers together, and so forth. If, therefore, I leave one organised body of Christians it must be to join or—hateful thought !—to found another. This other, unless it consists of myself alone, can never perfectly meet my ideas of a perfect Church. But least of all can it be a Church if it consists of myself alone ! No people however—not even two—think exactly alike, and the ancient and honourable institution of matrimony itself had, so long as men insisted on complete unity of opinion, to be based on the suppression of one set of opinions altogether.[1] Two people express their opinions and these opinions are found sooner or later to diverge at some point. This is inevitable. Every one who joins a society must therefore sacrifice something.

The difficulty, of course, is to decide how much one has a right to sacrifice. It is not whether one can sacrifice *anything*, for this one must do ; but how much ? To me this further depends on the hope or possibility of changing some of the things disliked. A man must give up something to belong to an organisation at all, but some things not fundamental he may feel it right to give up ; others more import-

[1] In a letter dated 1758, John Howard, the great prison reformer, writes : " My dear, for the prevention of those discords which I have observed to prevail amongst married people, it is my wish that in case of any disagreement arising between us my will should prevail."

ant he is willing to wait for, if there is hope of attaining them later.

I suppose that those of my fellow-churchmen who dislike certain things in the Church of England—more than dislike them, think them wrong—stay in it because they hope these things may be changed. They do not dream of getting a Church which shall be remoulded to their heart's desire in all things. Even were it possible, modesty forbids them to believe that such a Church would be a perfect Church! But on some points, on which they feel a deep and intense conviction, they may hope for change and believe that change is possible.

This is fundamental. If a Church is dying or dead, the hope of change dies too: as long as it lives it can change. I believe the Church of England to be alive. Long contact with officialism may make this belief difficult for some, but it revives when one meets the unofficial Anglican. There are too many who care passionately for our Church, and care also for the things they want and hope to find in her, for us to believe that she is really dead or dying. Movements for reform, born of ardent spirits in love at once with what the Church is and what it may be, are captured by a prudent officialism; bishops are substituted for prophets, and the movement dies a respectable death; but still the rebels remain and their spirit does not die. If the Church of England should ever again be a living expression of the religious genius of the people of England, it will be because these rebels refused to be cast out. For the sake, therefore, of those who would like to be of us, but for whom at present the barriers are insurmountable—for the very sake, that is, of those who may

perhaps wonder at us for staying where we are—I pray that all Anglicans who can stay will do so.

I have passed—not unintentionally—from the Church to the Church of England. It is because among other human needs I recognise the need of diversity. I see nothing desirable in an organisation which imposes itself as the only possible organisation by and through which men may approach God. Such an organisation is as remote from human needs as is the refusal to organise at all. It is surely significant that different races and nations evolve different types of worship and therefore different "Churches." It cannot be because one nation or race is more truly good than another that these things happen; or (as I think) that one has a clearer perception of truth. Roman Catholicism is as natural to the Latin races as Greek Catholicism to the Slav. Anglicanism is the natural expression of the religious genius of the English people—as natural to them as Presbyterianism to the Scotch. I do not feel at home in a Presbyterian Church, nor does Presbyterian worship appeal to me, but I am not so stupid as to fail to see how profoundly it appeals to the Scotch! Anglicanism has its defects, and any Anglican may smile at them, but English people feel at home in the Church of England, and I for one pray that she may never cast me out.

I hope to be forgiven by my many Free Church friends if I say that I think the future of religion in this country lies with the national Church; that I believe there would have been little, if any, dissent if it had not been for the extraordinary folly of Church of England leaders in the past; that most forms of dissent seem to me as alien to the genius

of the English people as Anglicanism or Presbyterianism to the Latin races.

I do not understand why Christians should seek to proselytise each other or send Protestant or Roman Catholic missions to Roman Catholic or Protestant nations. It is incomprehensible to me that any one should really hope or seriously wish to make the South of Ireland Protestant or the North Roman Catholic. Does any one believe that he has a monopoly of the truth?

I desire unity but not uniformity: a Catholic Church in spirit, of which no part or branch unchurches another; but not one set of doctrines, one liturgy, or one form of worship for all. One of the qualities that most appeals to me in my own Church is its exceeding toleration.

Once, in discussing some scandal in the Church of England with a Quaker friend, he said to me, "I do not know how you tolerate such people inside the Church. The Society of Friends would have found means of freezing them out long ago." With joy I realised that no one is ever frozen out of the Church of England: no one—or hardly any one—excommunicated from her altars. At her most sacred service, the Holy Communion, saint and sinner kneel together; the sweating employer and the slum landlord with their victims; the profligate with the virtuous. This scandalises the virtuous sometimes. I do not know why, for nothing seems more certain than that we are quite incapable of judging who are the virtuous and who not. For my part, the social snobbery of the Church of England is less odious than the spiritual snobbery which is the besetting sin of more exclusive societies.

We shall never all worship in the same way, but I think we shall some day recognise that all who love Christ are of one communion, and we shall unchurch nobody. In the meantime, I cannot wish that differences of temperament and genius that exist among us should be ironed out into a flat monotony when we approach God in public worship, or even wish that we were all alike. I feel at home in a Church of England service: I do not desire all men to feel as I do, and I respect and even like the differences which I must believe not offensive to God who made us all so individual and different.

Chapter XX.

Sacramentalism

The sacramental idea has given us sacraments, but is more profound than any of the methods by which we express our belief in it. Even though some Christian communions have no sacraments, it is true of them also that Christ's religion is sacramental.

Sacramental religion is religion based on the belief that God made the world and that he found it good. The sacramentalist believes that God is revealed through the world he has made, and that it is still, in spite of its failures and defects, able to declare the glory of its Maker. It should be the perfect expression of the Holy Spirit, as the bodies of men and women of the spirits whose temples they are. This is not so: the material universe (again like the human body) does not perfectly express the mind of God; but yet it is good.

In this belief—that the material universe is the sacrament of the presence of God—Christianity differs from some other great Eastern faiths. All the great living religions of the world to-day were born in the East; Christianity not in the heart of Asia as Buddhism was, but on the very edge of it, between East and West, at the centre of the known world of that time. The universality of Christ is perhaps symbolised in this. His conquest of the

West has been due, I believe, to that quality of hope and joy which is characteristic of a religion of redemption. The note of renunciation is there also—"He that hateth not his own father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, cannot be my disciple"[1]—but it is never one of resignation or despair, nor is Christianity a religion of escape. The world is good and its redemption possible. Even now it is a revelation of the nature of God. Nature itself bears witness to his glory and his love.

To the sacramentalist, then, matter is the sacrament of the spirit, the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. This is clearly the teaching of Christ. Material things, therefore, are also spiritual things, and the belief that we can draw a sharp distinction between them is mistaken. What the scientist is proving to-day, the poets perceived long ago, and Christ (who was both) based his religion on this truth. In all discussion, whether of sacramentalism or of sacraments, we must follow him and avoid the mistake of supposing that we are making real distinctions when we use such words as "material" and "spiritual," "natural" and "supernatural," "objective" and "subjective." We cannot avoid using them, but we must bear in mind that they do not represent reality. A sacrament is "the depth beyond the depth and the height above the height," where "our hearing is not hearing and our seeing is not sight." It recognises that "soul is form and doth the body make." It is the "power beyond" of which Tennyson wrote:—

[1] Luke xiv. 26.

"How far beyond that grove and brake
Yon nightingale is heard.
What power beyond the bird could make
Such music in the bird?"

All art is sacramental for it sees in material things the presence of the spirit and, being creative, compels matter to express that spirit. The difference between a paint-box and a picture is that the genius of the artist has made of paint the expression of his spirit. The artist takes paint and canvas, marble or wood, brass or strings, and creates a work of art. We use our spirits to carve our own bodies into an expression of what we are, though often we do it unwittingly or unwillingly.

There is little or no great Christian art where Christianity has been taught without emphasis on sacramental thinking. Where the stress of theology has been on the wickedness of the world or the total depravity of man, the beauty of created things has not been noticed or valued, and art has been regarded rather as a temptation of the devil than a revelation of God. The Roman and Greek Catholic Churches, even at their gloomiest and most monastic, have been saved from this belief by their emphasis on sacramentalism. They have produced some appalling art, but they have also produced the great cathedrals, the noblest music, the most glorious painting and statues, where Protestantism has produced little or nothing. Even in poetry, of which for some reason Protestantism has not been so suspicious, Dante outsoars Milton. We cannot think ignobly of the world and its beauty and then make beauty out of it.

We should see this more clearly if we had not so

atrophied by disuse our power of mingling spirit and matter in creation. Industrialism has almost robbed our Western civilisation of arts and crafts, and many do not understand that matter must be wrought upon by spirit if it is to be beautiful. Our materialism has gone near to undo the progress of spirit in other matters. People actually believe that matter can be made beautiful by machinery and without spiritual labour. If we are ever to unlearn this, it will be by a recovery of the sacramentalism of Christ, and those who have most quarrel with Catholicism should remember how deeply we are indebted to it for keeping this always in mind. Even the accusation of magic, so justly brought against some of the cruder forms of sacramentalism, must not outweigh our sense of gratitude. The instinct that makes the High Churchmen of the Church of England spend money on beautifying a church in a slum is a Christlike instinct. If we cannot, in Whitechapel or Shoreditch, consider the lilies, let us at least make something beautiful which we may consider instead.

Our Lord, believing that all material things are revelations of the divine, took the simplest and humblest of them as in a special sense sacramental. He calls his hearers to consider the lilies because they were so common and valueless[1]; the sparrows because they were sold at two for a farthing. He took water and washing for the sacrament of baptism, bread and wine for Holy Communion. We have lost something of the beauty of this, because wine is not the drink of the poor in this country as

[1] They were not, of course, costly blooms like ours, but the wild flowers round Jerusalem.

in the East, and there is unfortunately no drink that is in universal use as bread is for food. Nothing, therefore, can quite replace the wine. Water cannot, because it owes nothing to man, and in this Holy Communion Christ shows that we should be in communion not only with God but with one another. Both bread and wine convey this meaning. Wheat and grapes are the gift of God, but as bread and wine owe something also to men's hands, and no food or drink of which this is not true has the same sweet and touching significance for sacramental use. If God is our Father, all we are brothers. We learn this from Christ who first taught us to pray in this sense. Thus we are in communion, through him, at once with God and man.

The danger of thinking not sacramentally but magically is real in fact, though there is no trace of it in our Lord's teaching. In baptism nothing magical happens. We are not " made " the children of God—a dreadful doctrine still enshrined in our Anglican catechism and baptismal service—we *are* his children, all of us, good and bad, baptised and unbaptised. Our Lord did not say to those who brought their children to him, " take them away and baptise them and then suffer them to come unto me," but " of such is the kingdom of heaven." I do not know how men have found it possible to refuse baptism to children after this, or to argue that we must have attained some higher spiritual level or deeper spiritual experience before we receive this sacrament. The baptism of babies—all babies, any baby—before we know whether they are going to be good or bad, spiritual or unspiritual, is a recognition of the tremendous fact that every baby is a

child of God—it is not a magical process by which the child becomes one.

A friend of mine, who is the head of a large school, once assured me that she " could tell " which of her children had been baptised and which not. This is a staggering assertion. I rather think she could tell which of them had been brought up in Christian homes or not : and as this would generally, though not always, coincide with the baptising or not baptising, it would be easy to assume that any child who did not exactly fit the supposed classification was an example of those exceptions to our theological rules which, unfortunately, exist in so inconvenient a manner ! The existence of these exceptions ought, however, to dispose at once of the magical view of sacrament. It is extraordinarily difficult to understand how it has survived the existence of the Society of Friends, among whose members have been some of the best Christians and truest saints. If only we had a little of the scientific spirit of our Lord, we should not be content merely to admit the fact of these exceptions, and continue to hold a theory of the Church which assumes that the facts do not exist. It is this form of dishonesty which makes people, to whom Church membership would be a source of joy and a real and needed spiritual discipline, give it up in despair. If the scientist has taught us by his example to give up the most cherished theory if it is " wrecked on one inconvenient fact," he has also taught us to demand a like uncompromising honesty from the theologian, and to turn with disgust from a religion which seems content with so much lower a standard of truth.

Sacraments are not magical in their effect, and an unbaptised Quaker may be as true a saint as a baptised Catholic. Yet sacramental grace is real. The prayers of the Church, the reception of the child into its fellowship, of the communicant to a deeper unity with God and man—these are realities. Because I believe this, I would have no one excluded except by his own choice. I have known many people who were unaware of their own loss till they received the Holy Communion, who then realised the meaning of the value of Christ's sacramentalism as they would never have done by merely hearing it spoken of or described.

The value of a sacrament is therefore not wholly subjective: it has an absolute reality like the reality of beauty in a picture. A picture is not merely material; paint and canvas are not the whole of it. To a blind man, or a colour-blind man, or a man devoid of any sense of beauty, it may seem no more and it is no more; but that is his defect, and his defect does not destroy the beauty of the picture: it exists independently of him. So the defect of the communicant may make the Holy Communion meaningless to him, and he will contemptuously affirm that the experience of the sacramentalist is purely subjective: but it is not so. It is as "real" as beauty.

A Nonconformist friend of mine, discussing the more liberal attitude of modern Nonconformity to the arts in worship, assured me that when he realised how much some of us were helped by (the instance actually used) the music of Westminster Cathedral, he had no wish to deprive us of it. "One does not take a doll from a child," he said indulgently.

This ignorant tolerance of the greatest of all the arts is the opposite of what I understand by sacramentalism, and, while I admit that, like all great teaching, it is dangerous—dangerous because a sense of the supernatural may easily decline into magic, and often has done so—I still believe that to be indifferent to beauty in worship is a lamentable defect. The arrogance of those who speak of beauty and order, ritual, architecture, and music, used in the service of God, as though they were concessions to an undeveloped and childish state of spiritual development, are not more advanced than others but merely more defective. Certainly one should be able to do without these things: a saint can, though with a deep sense of loss, live in a slum and give up considering the lilies. God can give up heaven and enter the slums of the universe. Heaven and the lilies, the echoing music of the mass, the soaring voices of the choir, the storied windows, architecture itself, are not the less divinely inspired and inspiring for that, nor the less to be desired.

I am, without doubt, deaf, blind, and stupid to many things: I pray that I may not be so stupid as to be proud of being stupid or think it a proof of superior spiritual development.

I have learned to value the silence of the Quaker: I rejoice to realise that—though the Quaker may not take our mass from us—we, if we are not too proud to learn, may take his silent worship for our possession.

I have learned to value the free prayer of the Nonconformist: I hope I need not for that reason cease to love the majestic forms and words of our Anglican liturgy. It is to me a glorious experience

to use the very phrases the saints have used throughout the ages. When I repeat the Psalms or the Lord's Prayer, the "Gloria in excelsis," or the Confession, I am conscious that I draw near to God by the path the saints have trod, and realise with humble joy that what was true for them is true for me also. With an experience immeasurably less deep and full in content, I still share their spiritual life. Its phrases and prayers and thanksgiving are valid for me also. The Communion of the Saints becomes a reality to me, and I, trembling, take their words upon my lips.

My Church is sacramental. The Quaker will declare that his is also. I have heard him claim that silence is his sacrament, as the Free Churchman maintains that the sermon is his. In a sense no doubt they are so: it is a sense which allows the High Churchman and the Roman Catholic to place confession among the sacraments: but I think that this makes the idea of a sacrament too wide and vague. Sacramentalism is a recognition of material things as the channel of spiritual things, and where the material is lacking the full force of the sacrament is unexpressed. It is, I believe, a sound instinct which has made the Church of England set the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion by themselves. In them the material is actually the sacrament, and the commonness of the things chosen recalls us to the truth of the Quaker view that everything is sacramental, without allowing our sense of it to become so vague and nebulous as to be easily lost.

The commonness of washing and eating as religious rites has even shocked some people. Learning that such an initiatory rite was common to

many of the mystery religions—some of them superstitious and degrading—they feel that the sacredness has departed from Christian baptism. When further informed that eating and drinking the flesh and blood of their god as a means of sharing his power is almost universal, and has been found in some of the most primitive religions of savage men, reverence for the Holy Communion becomes impossible to them. This is strange to me—as strange as though we should cease to believe in God because all men everywhere have believed in him. Instead of rejecting a rite which recalls our first human striving after some relation between man and his Maker—between physical and spiritual powers—I receive it with a greater reverence. It binds me to the past of my race where most we are one—in our aspiration towards God.

I realise that, so soon as men became human, they sought, no longer altogether blindly but consciously and of set purpose, to find that right relationship between themselves and God which they were dimly but surely aware that they had lost. It shows me those forefathers of ours realising that there is a link between the material and the spiritual. It shows them on the right road, not despising or escaping from material things, but seeking a way to the Spirit through matter. If it was a crude and gross belief that a man could become one with the totem of his tribe or the god of his worship, by eating him, it was not much more crude than many of the thoughts we have to-day about God.

I try now to put into words what our Holy Communion service means to me, and I realise how crude I shall seem to minds more spiritually developed

than my own: but I think that such minds will no more despise me than I my rude ancestors, nor will they contemptuously decide that my spiritual dullness makes their sacrament invalid.

To me, then, the sacrament of Holy Communion expresses a truth and conveys a grace which neither words nor silence alone can adequately convey. At this holy service body and soul alike are fed, because body and soul alike belong to God. The sacredness of material as well as spiritual things is recognised. This is why many of us prefer to receive the Holy Communion fasting. We go early because we wish our thoughts to be undistracted by other matters: almost instinctively, it seems to me, the desire that the spiritual reception of our Lord should be the first thought in our minds is accompanied by the desire that the food he gives us should be the first to pass our lips. I cannot see why this very natural and spontaneous impulse should seem superstitious or gross to so many critics. I was not brought up to go to Holy Communion fasting, but I was taught to go early in the morning and to exclude other thoughts from my mind as far as possible. To go fasting, and bring my body into the same worship as my mind and spirit, seemed and still seems a natural corollary. But to insist on doing so when the probability is that the fasting communicant will proceed to faint and disturb the whole congregation is to convert reverence into irreverence, and to refuse the Holy Communion altogether to people who, for example, can only come in the evening and therefore not fasting, is surely to make the word of God of none effect through our tradition.

I do not myself like evening communion, and I

intensely dislike to receive the Blessed Sacrament except fasting; but to go without it altogether, or cause others to go without it, because they are prevented from doing as I do seems to me really horrifying. Our Lord said nothing about fasting communion and nothing about the time of our receiving it, but he did say "Do this in remembrance of me . . . drink ye all of this."

Everywhere the common meal is a rite of friendship. Christ takes this old and beautiful idea and lifts it on to a higher spiritual plane. He makes of this common act of eating and drinking a communion with God and man. This is the deepest and highest communion of all. It arises, not out of the eating and drinking, but of a unity of spirit. Christ gave his life—his body and blood—for us. We, if we receive this sacrament, must offer ourselves to share in it. We "offer and present to God our souls and bodies to be a reasonable holy and living sacrifice." He asks us, "Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of?" and we answer, kneeling before him at the altar, "Lord, we can." Then we are entitled to receive the food necessary to us for this service—food for both bodies and souls which we here present. If we are not willing to share his sacrifice we have no claim to receive that food. We receive his body and blood because we are willing to give our own.

This is a fearful thought. I cannot go further than a prayer that I may be willing; I trust this is accepted. James and John did not know what they were saying when they declared their ability to drink of the cup from which the Lord was to drink, yet he accepted them. "Ye shall indeed drink of the cup

that I drink of." They failed and fled in the hour of danger, but afterwards they triumphed over themselves and followed their Lord to death. The Holy Communion is our offering of ourselves—all ignorant for the most part—to share the sacrifice of Christ, but, as we make the offering, we know we must fail unless he gives us himself. We ask him to do so because we desire to be and to do what he asks of us. This is our Holy Communion. I think we should not receive it unless we mean this.

The sacrament is a recognition of our common human need. We must all eat to live. But for what purpose do we live? That we may serve. Christ also had to eat and drink, and he lived only to serve. The institution of the Holy Communion is not recorded in the Fourth Gospel but the symbolic act of the washing of the disciples' feet by Christ is there. It is the other side of the Last Supper. We have only a right to our share of the world's food if we take our share in the world's service. "If any will not work neither shall he eat." It is a sacramental thought. "Bless these gifts to our use and us to thy service." Our Christian prayers are penetrated with this idea. By it, all meals become sacramental, for sacramentalism is based on the knowledge of our common human needs; it accepts and consecrates them. The first Christians hardly distinguished between the Holy Communion and the Agape; but one has become more and more a mystical communion with God; the other has disappeared, or survived only in the habit of saying grace.

My experience of Free Church communion is that the sense of fellowship with one's fellow-men is

emphasised, and that the communion of God is attenuated: in the Anglican service the reverse is true. To most Anglicans, Holy Communion is an intensely individualistic act. We are inclined to go alone to it, or at the least in silence. We look neither to right nor left for fear we should see some one we know. A boy who approached the altar for the first time, smiling with pleasure at the friend whom he recognised in passing, was the subject of complaint on the part of his fellow-communicants, who told the priest that he was "in no fit state to approach the altar of God." At a Free Church communion, on the other hand, I have, I confess, felt a difficulty in recognising the supernatural at all. It has all seemed to me very friendly, but in no sense awful.

I do not know if it is humanly possible to conceive a form of Holy Communion in which both elements are equally present—the sense of communion with God and men equally real. Perhaps it is not. The very act of kneeling to receive the bread and wine seems to emphasise the one at the expense of the other—of sitting, to have a like defect. Perhaps in a perfect Church we shall recognise the limitations of human words and acts, keep the awful Communion of the body and blood of Christ, and revise the ancient friendly Agape to follow a friendly human meal and bring home to us the meaning of our eating and drinking together. Whatever is gained or lost, I believe that Christianity in the future will never lose its sacramental idea: I believe, on the contrary, that it is becoming more real and more necessary to most Christians. We can unite silence, freedom, and ritual in our worship; but the fundamentally Christian belief in

the beauty and reality of material things, the conviction that in them we see God for they are the channels of his grace, the belief that sin is the failure to see this, and redemption the recovery of a right understanding of the relation between matter and spirit—this will deepen more and more.

Chapter XXI.

The Future

What should Christian people be aiming at to-day? And what may we hope of the Christian Church in the future? It is clear that we must accept the revelation of God given to us in his physical universe and expounded to us by science: accept the existence of a universal order based on the wisdom and the love of God: and devote ourselves to finding out what that order is and ordering our own lives in accordance with it.

It is sometimes said that there are "no natural rights": there are only rights created by human laws. I believe this to be the reverse of the truth. There are natural rights. All human laws should be attempts, more or less tentative, to base human relationships and human societies on those natural rights. This is the only way in which we can build our house upon the rock. To build our house upon the sand is to build on the assumption that we can make what laws and what order we choose. We can no more do this than we can build a material house in defiance of the law of gravitation or any other law of building. We can, of course, set about this ridiculous task but we shall not succeed. Every building is lasting, right, and beautiful in proportion as it recognises the purpose for which it is built and the conditions under which it must be

built. The variety and beauty of buildings is in proportion to the variety and nature of the problems set before the builder. One set of circumstances gives us Venice and another New York. Both are magnificent examples of the adaptation of man's needs and powers to his circumstances. Laws remain the same.

In building a state, a home, or an individual life, to disregard the spiritual laws of the universe is to court inevitable catastrophe. The result of our attempting to violate this eternal order is seen in our social disorders. War, industrial disputes, ignorance, reaction are like the ruins of a building whose builder neither knew nor heeded the laws of building. The laws remain—the building falls to the ground. It may be that innocent lives are crushed in the fall. Those on whom the Tower of Siloam fell—" think ye that they were sinners above all men dwelling in Jerusalem? I tell you no; but unless ye all repent ye shall all likewise perish."

I cannot over-emphasise my sense of the service done to theology by the discovery of scientific law. The scientist does not waste his time complaining of the injustice of these laws or considering how he may defy or evade them: his whole desire is to understand and to obey them. The majestic achievements of modern science are the result.

Without doubt there are laws of human conduct and spiritual discipline also. The theologian—the ordinary Christian—must cease bewailing their nature or considering how they may be evaded or defied, and seek only to understand and to obey. Legislators and rulers, priests and teachers, should seek to understand the nature of God and his order,

and to pass laws, establish customs, build our social order, in accordance with them.

For the laws of God are in the nature of things and can no more be altered than the laws of Nature. As all our pains and penalties arise from our ignoring them, so all our progress and our power depend on our understanding and obeying them. Even our intellectual achievements turn to our danger and our harm, until we are as much lords in the spiritual world as we are already in the material world. Only the service of God is perfect freedom.

The Church above all should give itself to the discovery of these laws and the establishment of this order. It is so unlike the law and order of this world (" My kingdom is not of this world ") that a body of people is required to make experiments and to undertake adventures. As we are social beings, we cannot solve the problems set us for the redemption of the world alone. A fellowship of people is required. It is therefore impossible to dispense with the Church. The fellowship of discovery and adventure *is* the true Church.

I pray that boldness, adventure, and loyalty may one day be as much the quality of organised Christianity as to-day are timidity, conservatism, and dissension. I see the possibility of a true spiritual union in such adventure. I do not believe that union is ever created by external organisation, and I neither expect nor wish all men to worship or to think alike. Christians have mistaken uniformity for unity and, in seeking to create the first, they have sacrificed the second.

When we are all embarked upon the great adventure of following Christ and seeking to understand

and obey his teaching, we shall find ourselves at one. Our bond of unity will not be an organisation but the goal which all Christian organisations set before them. We shall even like and enjoy our differences, because we shall value each other's discoveries.

I think of the Church of the future as that great seer, Sir Thomas More, saw it: as a mighty cathedral round whose nave many chapels are found. In each we may worship as we think best—Roman Catholic, Greek, Anglican, Presbyterian, Quaker, and the rest: but at times we shall all unite in a great act of worship in the nave that is open to us all. Perhaps even we shall allow ourselves to wander into other chapels sometimes, and the Roman Catholic join in the silent worship of the Quaker, the Quaker in the majestic ceremonial of the mass.

This is in the dim and distant future, perhaps; but the world is young yet and Christianity younger still. Half a million years at least the scientists give us for the development of the human race: not two thousand have passed since he came who alone has showed us, in his life and death, what humanity is and to what evolutionary goal we all are striving. Let us then be united in our love of our Lord Christ, for the recitation of creeds has not united and cannot unite us. Hope and faith are great, but love is the greatest of all.

To which end may God speedily bring us Christian people. Amen.

THE END